

The Transformation of Vernacular Expression  
in Early Modern Arts

# Intersections

## Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture

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# The Transformation of Vernacular Expression in Early Modern Arts

*Edited by*

Joost Keizer and Todd M. Richardson



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INTRODUCTION:  
THE TRANSFORMATION OF VERNACULAR EXPRESSION  
IN EARLY MODERN ARTS

Joost Keizer and Todd M. Richardson

*The Place of the Vernacular in Early Modern Culture*

Painting, Leonardo da Vinci says, ‘needs no interpreters of different languages as letters do’. It is therefore more universal, ‘communicable to all generations of the universe’. Grounded in nature rather than in culture, it is less dependent on the geographical and temporal boundaries of different languages spoken at different times and in different places. Painting easily travels across time and space. Wherever it touches ground – now, then, here or there – it is received directly and spontaneously, without the intervention of translators and commentators. Whoever trusts her or his eye, Leonardo theorizes, can rely on the truth in painting.<sup>1</sup>

*Pace* Leonardo, pictorial realism was not some universal language, understandable for people across space and time. Much like the spoken and written languages to which Leonardo denies universal accessibility, the reality effect of early modern art, too, is a cultural system whose understanding is bound to geography and history.<sup>2</sup> Take, for example, the words of one of the members of the Greek delegation to the Council of Ferrara (1439), Gregory Melissenus, who complained to his master, the Patriarch of Constantinople, that:

When I enter a Latin church I do not revere any of the [images of] the saints that are there because I do not recognize any of them. At most, I may recognize Christ, but I do not revere him either, since I do not know in what terms he is described. So I make the sign of the cross and I revere this sign that I have made myself, not anything I have seen there.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Farago C.J. (ed.), *Leonardo da Vinci's "Paragone": A Critical Interpretation With a New Edition of the Text in the "Codex Urbino"* (Leiden: 1992) 185–187.

<sup>2</sup> Barthes R., “The Reality Effect”, in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: 1986) 141–48.

<sup>3</sup> Mango C., *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453* (Inglewood Cliffs, NJ: 1972) 54.

Gregory understands naturalism as a form of visual communication, like language made up of culturally specific signs. For this visitor from Constantinople, naturalism looked like a language that cast the familiar – in this case Christ – in strange terms, as if Christ stood described to him in a language he did not master. What looked ‘natural’ to some looked disfigured to others.

There is a great paradox in Leonardo’s words, for he, too, knew that the visual arts are culturally specific – like language. In another note, also dating to the early 1490s, the artist recounts the history of art. In a few paragraphs, he explains that the universality he could attribute to naturalistic art was in fact bound to a specific time and place. It was a ‘style’, he says, practiced by the Romans (*i romani*); yet in post-Roman Europe that ‘style’ fell into decline – apparently because it was not that universal after all – only to be revived again by the Florentine painter Giotto.<sup>4</sup> Leonardo’s association of mimetic art with Roman antiquity is a familiar one. Michael Baxandall catalogued a whole array of texts from the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries that also speak of Renaissance naturalism as a culturally specific mode of art-making that writers associated with antique culture; most Renaissance artists were compared to ancient artists, whose names survived in the pages of Pliny’s *Natural History* and other antique texts known to the period. And for Baxandall the reality effect of such painting was only understandable to the select few: to those who could appreciate Ciceronian Latin, not to the crowds Leonardo imagined attending to the lessons of mimetic art.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Petrarch had already claimed that the artistic achievements of Giotto – whom Leonardo counted among the champions of accessible naturalism – were only understood by a very limited number of art lovers.<sup>6</sup> Claims like Petrarch’s aligned words with pictures, artistic styles with language.<sup>7</sup> Giotto’s art, Petrarch implies, is

<sup>4</sup> Richter J.-P. (ed.), *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, 2nd ed., 2 vols (Oxford: 1939) I, 371–72, § 660.

<sup>5</sup> Baxandall M., *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350–1450* (Oxford: 1971).

<sup>6</sup> Mommsen T.E. (ed. and trans.), *Petrarch’s Testament* (Ithaca, NY: 1957) 79–81.

<sup>7</sup> It might be pointed out here that Baxandall saw Ciceronian Latin as constitutive for the *reception* of contemporary art. He never said that the production of art conformed to the dictates of language. In fact, he suggests that Ciceronian language had a limiting effect on the understanding of painting: because humanists wrote in a language dictated by literary tradition rather than lived experience, they were unable to describe any of the characteristics present in contemporary art that were unaccounted for by that tradition. Baxandall’s thesis rests on a debatable theory of linguistic

entirely *like* the Ciceronian Latin in which he wrote – a cultural system, a language, only accessible to himself and some of his peers.

The Latinized culture of literature and the visual arts epitomized by Petrarch and later European humanists stood in a dialectical relationship with other languages – the vernacular languages spoken by everyone else, such as Tuscan and other regional dialects. For some, those languages were crude and uncultivated: the language of the masses, not the literary few. The English term *vernacular* is derived from the Latin *vernaculus*. The word *verna* was originally used to distinguish the home-born, house-bred slave from the more common *servus*, a slave who could, and often did, originate from faraway lands at the fringe of the Roman Empire.<sup>8</sup> *Vernacular* was the language of those slaves. The term connotes a rootedness in a tradition and implies a resistance to universals and international currents, which, in the early modern world, basically meant a resistance to Latin language and culture. The vernacular is often cast as an alternative to the official language of the Church and authoritative, classical authors.

In response to the dominance of Latin as the language of literary sophistication, Italian authors began to offer a strong vernacular alternative claiming equal literary sophistication. A tradition of vernacular writing was in place by the early fourteenth century. Dante wrote his *Divina Comedia* entirely in the vernacular – allowing even Vergil to speak Tuscan. And Petrarch, even if he felt a certain disdain for writing in a language accessible to the masses, also believed that the language of love needed the kind of corporeal presence and nearness of lived experience that only the native tongue could offer.<sup>9</sup> Remarkably enough, the vernacular works of both poets – and of Boccaccio, too – mention artists. The *Comedia* includes a well-known reference to Giotto, whose fame is used as an example of vainglory, and Petrarch's *Canzoniere* boast two poems in which the art of the Sienese painter Simone Martini is mentioned.

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relativity; see Nauta L., "Linguistic Relativity and the Humanist Imitation of Classical Latin", in Nauta L. (ed.), *Language and Cultural Change: Aspects of the Study and Use of Language in the Latin Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Leuven: 2006) 173–185.

<sup>8</sup> Glare P.W.G. (ed.), *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: 1982) s.v. "uerna"; cf. Simpson J.A. – Weiner E.S.C., *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: 1982) s.v. "vernacular".

<sup>9</sup> See Jean Campbell's discussion in this volume.

The term *vernacular* has also recently been adopted by art historians to describe native artistic practices. For Charles Dempsey, Petrarch's love poetry, with its references to Martini, offered a way out of Baxandall's exclusive insistence on the Latinized culture of Renaissance art.<sup>10</sup> For Dempsey, early Renaissance art was never as exclusively 'classical' as a long and venerable tradition of art historians had suggested – the tradition of idealist interpretations offered by, among others, Erwin Panofsky, André Chastel, and E.H. Gombrich. Panofsky *et alia* argued that Renaissance artists were interested in a revival of the classical past per se, an interest informed by a clear historical perspective through which classical culture was retrieved. We might do better, Dempsey submits, to revisit a famous phrase by Aby Warburg, who wrote in 1898: 'In the fifteenth century the antique as a source of poised and measured beauty – the hallmark of its influence as we have known it since Winckelmann – still counted for comparatively little'.<sup>11</sup> Warburg displaced artists' imitation of the classical past as a purely aesthetic interest in classical forms, and instead connected it to an interest in liveliness and animation; artists from Simone Martini to Sandro Botticelli saw ancient forms as personifications of a vivid society less dead, buried, and the object of archaeological and antiquarian inquiry than present in Renaissance life as if the Roman past was happening now. 'The figures of ancient myth', Warburg wrote, 'appeared before Italian society, not as plaster casts, but in person, as figures full of life and color, in the festival pageants through which pagan *joie de vivre* had kept its foothold in popular culture'.<sup>12</sup>

Dempsey argued for the vernacular roots of Simone Martini's – and Sandro Botticelli's – art. Simone's concept of beauty is less marked by 'poised and measured' beauty of antique art than it is informed by the vernacular poetry of Petrarch. A Petrarchan ideal of beauty shifted attention away from the antique, Latinized past towards the present of the painter's world. Dempsey pointed out that the Virgin in Simone Martini's *Maestà* in the Palazzo Comunale in Siena is modeled on a

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<sup>10</sup> Dempsey C., *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent* (Princeton, NJ: 1992). See also his more recent article, "The Importance of Vernacular Style in Renaissance Art: The Invention of Simone Martini's *Maestà* in the Palazzo Comunale [sic] in Siena", in Cropper E. (ed), *Dialogues in Art History, from Mesopotamian to Modern: Readings for a New Century* (Washington: 2009) 189–205.

<sup>11</sup> Warburg A., *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, ed. K. Forster (Los Angeles: 1999) 157–164.

<sup>12</sup> Warburg, *Renewal of Pagan Antiquity* 161.

concept of beauty grounded in local custom: she unveils her blond hair as if she were not the Virgin but a contemporary, French lady.<sup>13</sup> Dempsey never goes so far as to say that Simone Martini and Petrarch formulated a distinct vernacular style, a style different from the 'classical' mode associated with Giotto. C. Jean Campbell, in her contribution to this volume and elsewhere, has taken up the challenge.<sup>14</sup> Campbell locates the origins of a Renaissance concept of style not in the fixed product of the artwork but in its sense of becoming – in a poetics of making, with the *stylus* or pen. That sense of becoming aligns the making of art with a process of natural creation, an almost spontaneous imprinting of nature on the *carta* or panel.<sup>15</sup> Such a narrative, Campbell points out, is not incompatible with Petrarch's inclinations as an antiquarian humanist, for, in her apt words, 'Petrarch's engagement with Simone's style is less indicative of an essential aesthetic affinity between the two artists than it is reflective of a new perspective born in the moment when vernacular style (exemplified by the art of Simone Martini) became subject of Petrarch's historicizing, humanist perspective'.<sup>16</sup>

Late in his career, in his *Renaissance and Renascences* (1960), Panofsky realized that Warburg was right in claiming the lack of an archaeological perspective in early Renaissance art, tempting him to formulate a model of Italian Renaissance art that radically distinguished between the achievements of the generations of Renaissance artists up to the 1480s and the later generation of Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael.<sup>17</sup> Only by the end of the fifteenth century, Panofsky now argued, did the Renaissance acquire full force, when classical content met classical form. With the generations following Mantegna and Leonardo, a clear historical perspective on the classical past started to produce artworks that circumvent the essentially anachronic aesthetics of lived experience practiced by the earlier generations. Now the

<sup>13</sup> Dempsey, *Portrayal of Love*; and see Campbell C.J., "The Lady in the Council Chamber: Diplomacy and Poetry in Simone Martini's *Maestà*", *Word and Image* 14 (1998) 371–86.

<sup>14</sup> Besides her contribution here, see "Simone Martini, Petrarch, and the Vernacular Poetics of Early Renaissance Art", in Cropper (ed.) *Dialogues in Art History* 207–221.

<sup>15</sup> See also Alexandra Onuf's contribution to this volume, where she discusses the concept of the vernacular as method rather than style, subject, or iconography, and characterized by its capacity for transparent, immediate communication and inventive self-renewal.

<sup>16</sup> Campbell, "Simone Martini" 212.

<sup>17</sup> Panofsky E., *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Upsala: 1960).

classical past was not relived in the Renaissance present, it was fixed in time as a stable measure of ideal beauty. If fourteenth- and fifteenth-century naturalism had aimed at closing the gap between art and life, Panofsky allowed later 'classicism' to open the gap again.

In three important essays, however, Elizabeth Cropper argued for a reevaluation of sixteenth-century classicism along the lines proposed by Warburg and Dempsey for fourteenth- and fifteenth-century art.<sup>18</sup> As a strong and convincing alternative to the Neo-Platonic interpretations of beauty offered by Panofsky and others, Cropper instead proposed a model of Petrarchan beauty for sixteenth-century art. Cropper showed that artists like Leonardo and Raphael found beauty not in the matrix of Neo-Platonism, but on earth, in corporeal sensation, like Simone Martini in the fourteenth century. With Panofsky's 'true' Renaissance now also aligned with a Warburgian vernacular, the period as a whole could be understood as an engagement with life, corporeality, and vividness. If the vernacular language of Dante and Petrarch pulled the Latinized world into the experience of daily life, where people speak Tuscan and not Latin, then Renaissance art did the same.

The recent reevaluation of (Italian) Renaissance art on the model of vernacular poetry produces an almost impossible paradox. What was classical for some looked vernacular to others. The 'naturalness', vividness, and animation that Warburg, Dempsey, and Cropper associated with a Petrarchan vernacular, looked antique-like to Leonardo (and to many of Leonardo's contemporaries, predecessors, and successors catalogued by Baxandall). Art and literature that bears the traces of life in the world both constituted the local and particular, *and* the universal and classical. Dante's *Divina Comedia* was a vernacular work posing for a classical piece; Simone Martini's art engaged with a vernacular ideal of beauty that looked antique to others, including Petrarch himself. Petrarch's famous vernacular poem in which Simone Martini is mentioned (*Canzoniere*, 77, analyzed by C. Jean Campbell in this vol-

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<sup>18</sup> Cropper E., "The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture", in Ferguson M.W. – Quilligan M. – Vickers N.J. (eds.), *Rewriting the Renaissance. The Discourse of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago-London: 1986) 175–190, 355–359; Cropper E., "On Beautiful Women: Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style", *The Art Bulletin* 58 (1976) 374–394; and Cropper E., "The Place of Beauty on the High Renaissance and its Displacement in the History of Art", in Vos A. (ed.), *Place and Displacement in the Renaissance* (Binghamton, NY: 1994) 159–205.

ume) understands a vernacular kind of corporeal presence as an emulation of antique art. The poem's first line mentions the famous Greek sculptor Polyclitus's quest for beauty – 'No matter how hard Polyclitus looked, / like all the others famous for that art, not in a thousand years could they see even a small part of the beauty that has conquered my heart' – a beauty which the rest of the poem makes Simone discover not in antique art, but in a new aesthetics of lived experience. Simone 'saw her' (Laura) in paradise 'to give faithful testimony down here of her beautiful face' (*per far fede qua giù del suo bel viso*). The fourteenth-century painter enters into a dialogue with the classical past by completing the project of searching for beauty on earth, instead of imitating the classical results of that search. Rather than looking at ancient works of art, Renaissance artists – according to the model offered by Petrarch – oriented art on life, just like Polyclitus and his generation, but then with more success.<sup>19</sup> According to this model, antique art itself had already been adopted as part of the vernacular.

Petrarch's poem allows for an anachronic dialogue in art – across time, culture, and space. For the very reason that artworks made by Martini, Leonardo, and Raphael registered the world in which they were made – mapping out the beauty of women as meticulously as they could – they *looked* contemporary. The practice of employing the vernacular, in other words, allowed not so much for a 'revival' of the classical past as it afforded a dialogue *with* the past. That dialogue also aligns the project of Renaissance artists with the project of Renaissance (vernacular) poets. For what else is Dante's *Comedia* than an effort to make the past and present communicate through the model of vernacular poetry? Dante and Vergil share space and time as they traverse in spatial and temporal liminality that is the journey from purgatory to hell.

### *The Transformation of Vernacular Expression in the Sixteenth Century*

The formative role played by Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio in shaping the vernacular as a constitutive force for the retrieval of antique

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<sup>19</sup> This creative process is taken up more theoretically by Bart Ramakers in his contribution to this volume, where he discusses the Renaissance concept of the imitation of nature. See also Richardson T.M., *Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Art Discourse in the Sixteenth-Century Netherlands* (Farnham-Burlington, VT: 2011).

culture was capitalized upon in the early sixteenth century. Around 1500, the so-called language question (*questione della lingua*) offered a debate on the relative merits of vernacular languages over Latin that goes far beyond anything envisioned by the fourteenth-century generations of writers. Writing in the vernacular needed defense and theorizing. In his *Prose della volgar lingua* (*On the Vernacular Language*) of 1525, the Venetian poet Pietro Bembo treated the Tuscan language as if it were a classical language, subjecting it to Ciceronian and Quintilian rules of style.<sup>20</sup> What is important about Bembo's book, and the potential of the vernacular in shaping Renaissance culture as a whole, is the unprecedented emphasis it places on style, on *how* things are phrased and visualized rather than *what* is represented.<sup>21</sup> Bembo's interlocutor Carlo claims that writing exists as a split condition: 'The material of subject matter – as we like to say – of that which is written, and the form or appearance that is given to that material, that is to say, writing'.<sup>22</sup> Bembo's words mark a departure from earlier concepts of style, formulated according to Aristotelian models that tied style to subject matter. Rather than relying on a model of affective relations propagated by Petrarch, which essentially ties style to subject – beauty to woman, affection and love to naturalism – Bembo forestalls all rules of decorum (the appropriate connection between form and content). Bembo contends that the selection of a mode of expression is dependent on rules of pleasantness (*la piacevolezza*) and literary weight (*la gravità*).<sup>23</sup>

Around the time that Bembo was making his argument about the separation of style and content, art theoreticians also began to formulate a concept of style independent from subject matter.<sup>24</sup> And that separation, too, clarified the distinction between Latinized, international styles and local modes of representation. In common with the theorists of literature like Bembo, the emancipation of style in the

<sup>20</sup> For a recent study of the *questione della lingua*, with bibliography, see Pistolesi E., *Con Dante attraverso il Cinquecento: Il "De Vulgari Eloquentia" e la questione della lingua* (Florence: 2000).

<sup>21</sup> See Dionisotti C. in Bembo Pietro, *Prose e rime di Pietro Bembo* (Turin, 1971) 52; cited in Reilly P.L., "Raphael's *Fire in the Borgo* and the Italian Pictorial Vernacular", *The Art Bulletin* 92 (2010) 308–25.

<sup>22</sup> Bembo, *Prose e rime* 136: 'la materia o soggetto, che dire vogliamo, del quale si scrive, e la forma o apparenza, che a quella materia si dà, e cioè è la scrittura'.

<sup>23</sup> Bembo, *Prose e rime* 137, 146.

<sup>24</sup> See Sohm P., *Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: 2001).



visual arts grew out of discussions about the place of the vernacular in society. A concept of style as an independent representational force was ironed out in Vasari's *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (1550 and 1568). For Vasari, like it had been for Bembo, the measure of style was Tuscan art, which he contrasted to other regions on the Italian peninsula and across the Alps: for example, a Greek mode of representation reserved for Byzantine art, and the German manner for certain strains in medieval and contemporary art.<sup>25</sup> Free from the constraints of subject matter – religious and classical subjects that remain remarkably consistent throughout Western Europe at the time – style could now start to denote not only a rootedness in a certain period, but also in a region.

Take, for example, the reception of Flemish art in Italy. While fifteenth-century humanists claimed that the art of Flemish painters such as Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden marked the crowning achievement of the mimetic tradition inaugurated by Roman artists – analogues to the model of the temporal and spatial 'dialogue' developed by Dante, Petrarch, and Simone Martini – sixteenth-century theoreticians and artists in Italy emphasized Flemish painting as a regional style, a style lacking the transcultural and transtemporal qualities formerly attributed to naturalism.<sup>26</sup> The Portuguese painter and art theoretician Francisco de Holanda associated a certain mode of making with its geographical origins, terming Michelangelo's style the 'Italian style'. According to de Holanda, Michelangelo understood the verism of Flemish oil painting as a culturally specific mode of production that grew out of Flemish soil unmediated by universal rules of style: 'reason', 'art', 'symmetry', 'proportion', 'skillful choice', 'boldness', 'substance', and 'vigor' – all terms similar to the criteria formulated by Bembo for literature around the same time.<sup>27</sup> For Michelangelo,

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<sup>25</sup> For the idea of a period style, see Sohm P., "Ordering History with Style: Giorgio Vasari on the Art of History", in Payne A. – Kuttner A. – Smick R. (eds.) *Antiquity and its Interpreters* (Cambridge: 2000) 40–54; and Pfisterer U., *Donatello und die Entdeckung der Stile* (Munich: 2002).

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, the qualification of the fifteenth-century humanist Ciriaco d'Ancona of van Eyck's and van der Weyden's work; Stechow W., *Northern Renaissance Art, 1400–1500: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: 1966) 8–9. For the original source, see Panofsky E., *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origin and Character* (Cambridge, MA: 1953) 361.

<sup>27</sup> De Holanda Francisco, *Da pintura antiga. Introdução e notas de Angel González García* (Lisbon: 1983) 235–36. See also Alexandra Onuf's contribution to this volume for a discussion of these ideas in relation to representations of landscape.

pure naturalism was a nonstyle, a mode of making that registered lived experience unmediated by the artist's hand.

But even within the Italian peninsula, styles developed in different directions and different local schools. Vasari tells an anecdote about the Florentine painter Perino del Vaga, who, after a sojourn of about five years in Rome, returned to Florence in 1521–23. Upon his return, Florentine painting all of a sudden looked remarkably vernacular and local. Perino found a group of his peers gathered in the Brancacci Chapel, where everyone was copying Masaccio's work and praising it for its novelty, as well as that of Giotto. Perino was baffled by the Florentines' interest in the tradition of Giotto and Masaccio, and he proposed to show the 'Roman style' (*questa maniera di Roma*) to his compatriots by painting a fresco on the opposite wall of the chapel in that style.<sup>28</sup> A narrative of transformation operates within Vasari's anecdote. Perino's compatriots did not realize that they were working in a provincial mode: their practice was business as usual rather than a mode of resistance. It was only over time, during the first few decades of the sixteenth century, that the formulation of a concept of style as a marker of place was developed and that their practice looked remarkably Florentine – vernacular.

Thanks to increased travel and circulation of reproductive prints, the sixteenth century witnessed a collision of regional practices of art-making. If, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the vernacular served to establish a rhyming between contemporary and antique culture, then for sixteenth-century culture the vernacular offered a starting point for formulating a theory of regional languages and regional styles in the visual arts.

This dialogue with the classical past and defense of the vernacular in both poetic and theoretical terms was also taken up by the Pléiade poets in France. These French poets, including Joachim Du Bellay (1522–60) and Pierre de Ronsard (1524–85), subscribed to the humanist practice of embracing the themes and forms of classical literature, but they rejected the propagation of Latin as the only language for artistic and scholarly expression. They considered it their responsibility to defend the vernacular and to advocate its use by showing that it was just as capable of copious, apt, and ornate expression as were the

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<sup>28</sup> Vasari Giorgio, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, Bettarini R. – Barocchi P. (eds.), 6 vols. (Florence: 1966–71) V, 125–28.

languages of antiquity.<sup>29</sup> Rather than abandoning the natural language of their people (French) for one that is indigenous to other regions (Latin), these poets advocated a higher, better style for the vernacular and campaigned to encourage the translation and imitation of the ancients and Italians, including the subject matter of classical writers, into vernacular tongues. Whereas the vernacular had fallen into disrepute by following everyday usage or custom, classical Latin is systematically regulated by principles of rhetoric and poetry. To further develop the vernacular language, therefore, was a matter of integrating these artistic principles as regulating factors. The ideal was not one of crude imitation of outward appearance, but of a poet so well-versed in the inner principles that had guided the composition of ancient literature that he would be able to imaginatively mediate these forms to restructure the vernacular in new and inventive ways.<sup>30</sup>

To this end, in his *Deffence et Illustration de la langue françoise* (*Defense and Demonstration of the French Language* [1549]), Du Bellay recommended a rejection of much of the earlier native, rough French formal tradition and advocated vernacular innovation based on Greek and Roman poetic forms, emulation of specific models, and the creation of neologisms based on Greek and Latin: 'si pauvre et nue, qu'elle a besoing des ornementz [...] des plumes d'autrui' ('so poor and naked, it needs ornaments and [...] plumes from others').<sup>31</sup> Adjectives, comparisons, periphrasis, and other rhetorical devices, as well as the use of myth, were advocated as ways of achieving such enrichment. The changes, argued Du Bellay, incorporate both style and images, and he advocated that poets primarily use odes and sonnets. As Hope Glidden explains, "Through the imposition of formal constraints, the Pléiade elevated speech to become song, all the while creating an effect of naturalness in the most artificial of mediums, lyric poetry".<sup>32</sup>

In a famous passage, Du Bellay describes the development of languages as being like the process of grafting and the bearing of fruit. As classical Latin was formed and enriched by the remains of Greek, so French poets should reproduce the efforts of classical and Italian

<sup>29</sup> Castor G., *Pléiade Poetics: A Study in Sixteenth-Century Thought and Terminology* (Cambridge: 1964) 8.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Clements R.J., *Critical Theory and Practice of the Pléiade* (London: 1970) 189.

<sup>32</sup> Glidden H., *Lyrics of the French Renaissance: Marot, Du Bellay, Ronsard*, trans. Norman R. Shapiro (Chicago: 2002) 19.

writers, germinating the vernacular from seeds sown by both languages. And Pierre de Ronsard uses the same analogy of grafting to describe the interweaving of the Petrarchan intertext into his own work.<sup>33</sup>

The Pléiade program was also well known in the Netherlands. For example, the humanists Lucas De Heere and Jan van der Noot, though not members of the group, were prominent advocates of the cause.<sup>34</sup> In Dutch literary history, Van der Noot is generally considered to be the first major Dutch Renaissance poet, producing the first collection of lyrical poems of the Renaissance in the vernacular, *Het Bosken* (*The Small Wood*), in Antwerp in 1567. He lived in Antwerp and was a faithful follower of Ronsard.<sup>35</sup>

The love poetry of *Het Bosken* shares many traits with Pléiade poetry: sonnets and odes composed in a meter previously unknown in Dutch literature, many of them adaptations from Ronsard, some from Jean-Antoine Du Baïf, and others from Petrarch.<sup>36</sup> Like the Pléiade, van der Noot believed that other languages should be plundered for the betterment of one's own native tongue: 't was immers reeds mode geworden zijne taal met Italiaansche woorden en spreekwijzen op te sieren, te Italianiseeren of te 'Petrarquiseeren' ('for it had already been in fashion to adorn Flemish with Italian words and phrases, to make it Italianate or "Petrarchan"').<sup>37</sup> His fluency was even remarkable for a Fleming, a culture known for its language skills. For example, his *Verscheyden Poetische Werken / Divers Oeuvres Poétiques* (*A Selection of Poetic Work*), published in 1580, includes poems in French and Dutch and commentaries in Italian and Spanish.<sup>38</sup> K. ter Laan explains that van der Noot has the merit of representing the Pléiade in the Nether-

<sup>33</sup> Jeanneret, M., *A Feast of Words: Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance* (Oxford: 1991) 266.

<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, Peter Burke has shown that writers in one country were often inspired to emulate what was going on elsewhere. For example, Du Bellay borrowed from the dialogue on the vernacular by Sperone Speroni (1500–1588) in Italy. See Burke P., *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: 2004) 91.

<sup>35</sup> He came in contact with Ronsard during his stay in France while fleeing religious persecution from the Duke of Alba: see Van den Branden F.J. – Frederiks J.G., *Biographisch woordenboek der Noord- en Zuidnederlandsche letterkunde* (Amsterdam: 1888–91) 557.

<sup>36</sup> Zaalberg C.A., 'Das Buch Extasis' van Jan van der Noot (Assen: 1954) 252.

<sup>37</sup> Knuvelde G.P.M., "Jan van der Noot (ca. 1539–ca. 1600)", *Handboek tot de geschiedenis der Nederlandse letterkunde* (Den Bosch: 1971) II, 115.

<sup>38</sup> Forster L.W., *The Poet's Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature* (Cambridge: 1971) 32.

lands and succeeded in translating sonnets and odes (the new poetic form).<sup>39</sup> Significantly, Lucas de Heere is the only Dutch poet Van der Noot ever praises by name.

De Heere also greatly valued the Dutch language; the majority of his literary work, including his anthology of poems in *Den hof en boomgaerd der Poë sien* (*The Garden and Orchard of Poetry*), was written in Dutch in 1565. In his anthology, he asserts, 'En bovenal behoren wij onze eigen taal meer te gebruiken om er haar en ons land door te versieren' ('And above all, we ought to use our own language more often, in order to embellish her for our country').<sup>40</sup> According to Werner Waterschoot, as a rhetorician De Heere felt obligated to embellish his own language with countless borrowed words, as well as to mix the sentence constructions for the sake of his 'reghels mate' ('order').<sup>41</sup> Although *Den hof en boomgaerd* is written in Dutch, the structure of the poems introduce for the first time in the Netherlands what De Heere called 'reghels mate', which is based on French meter.<sup>42</sup> Like Van der Noot, his goal was to mediate – even translate – style and subject matter from French literature and classical antiquity into his native tongue.<sup>43</sup> Regarding the state of the history of the Dutch vernacular tradition, De Heere writes in the dedication of his collection that the 'ouden vlaemschen treyn van dicten zijn in veel zaken te ruut, ongheschickt en rouw' ('old Flemish poems are in many respects uncivilized, unsuitable / unqualified, and bad / rough'). In referring to his own vernacular tradition as 'uncivilized, bad, and rough', De Heere, like Du Bellay in his *Deffence*, sets forth his enterprise of cultivation.<sup>44</sup> After rejecting old Flemish diction as something to imitate, De Heere does not turn exclusively to Latin as his linguistic medium,

<sup>39</sup> Ter Laan K., *Letterkundig woordenboek voor Noord en Zuid* (The Hague: 1952) 375.

<sup>40</sup> De Heere Lucas, *Den hof en boomgaerd der Poë sien*, ed. W. Waterschoot (Zwolle: 1969), no. IV, lines 44–5.

<sup>41</sup> De Heere *Den hof en boomgaerd der Poë sien*, xxviii. A reaction against this practice developed later in the Netherlands, particularly in the North. Beginning in the late sixteenth century, writers sought to 'purify' the Dutch language; that is, to rid it of all mythology and borrowed words. See Burke, *Languages and Communities* 141.

<sup>42</sup> De Heere, *Den hof en boomgaerd der poesien* 102.

<sup>43</sup> De Heere acquired familiarity with French literature during 1559–60 when he stayed in Paris as an artist in the service of the Queen Mother, Catherine de Medici.

<sup>44</sup> For a comparison between De Heere's *Den Hof en Boomgaerd* and the work of Ronsard and Du Bellay, see Eringa S., *La Renaissance et Les Rhétoriciens Néerlandais: Matthieu de Casteleyn, Anna Bijns, Luc de Heere* (Amsterdam: 1920).

but rather combines the vernacular with formal elements from what he describes as more cultivated languages, such as French and Latin, in order to enrich and ennoble it. As a result, the poetry in his collection is extremely heterogeneous.<sup>45</sup>

Although it is safe to assume that both De Heere's poems and his agenda for the cultivation of the vernacular language would have been known in his artistic community, the defense for the use of Dutch was echoed in the rhetorician societies (*rederijkerkamers*), a literary community to which De Heere and Van der Noot belonged. In fact, in the introduction to his *Den hof en boomgaerd*, De Heere provides a defense of the chambers of rhetoric, which he sees as institutions for the encouragement of the use of the vernacular, as well as to enrich it through translating ideas or following concepts from classical antiquity or contemporaneous foreign works.<sup>46</sup> In 1541, Jan Gymnick compared the poor state of the vernacular to Latin and asserted that the only way Latin authors were able to enrich their own language into the elegance of classical Latin was by appropriating 'diverse forms of speaking from other languages [i.e., Greek]'. With equivalent efforts expended to improve Dutch, he saw no reason it should not rise to similar or even greater heights.<sup>47</sup>

But how did poetry and theater actually relate to the visual arts of that time?<sup>48</sup> Many chambers of rhetoric counted artists among their members; the *Violieren* in Antwerp, for instance, was directly associated with the artists' St. Lucas Guild. These close ties would have provided the occasion to discuss such interdisciplinary theoretical matters and possibly led to mutual influence and an exchange of ideas in respect to themes, subject matter, presentation, and structure. Their interaction is significant not only with respect to individual artists and particular themes, but also for broader contextual research,

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<sup>45</sup> Waterschoot W., "Marot or Ronsard? New French Poetics among Dutch Rhetoricians in the Second Half of the 16th Century", in Koopmans J. (ed.), *Rhetoric-Rhetoriqueurs-Rederijkers* (Amsterdam: 1995) 146. Not only does De Heere introduce new literary forms from France into the Low Countries, he translates many French poems, sometimes giving them a local twist. For example, the poem "Vanden Hane op den Esel" is partially based on Marot's "Du Coq á l'asne", but alludes to the endemic political situation: see De Heere, *Den hof en boomgaerd der poesien* 90.

<sup>46</sup> De Heere, *Den hof en boomgaerd der poesien* 3-4.

<sup>47</sup> Meadow M., "Bruegel's Procession to Calvary: Æmulatio and the Space of Vernacular Style", *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 46 (1996) 199.

<sup>48</sup> See Bart Ramakers's contribution to this volume where he takes up this question extensively.

such as similarities between artistic topics and cultural development.<sup>49</sup> Walter Gibson writes that ‘artists and poets drew from a common fund of subject matter [...]. In these chambers, artist and poet could be united in the same individual, and where they were not, they seem to have collaborated on numerous projects’.<sup>50</sup> In his study on drama and processional culture between the Middle Ages and modern era, Bart Ramakers discusses the interaction of various forms of artistic production – rederijkers, poets, artists – in the implementation of theatrical processions, an event for which the guild that represented these professions was largely responsible.<sup>51</sup> For example, rhetorician Mattheijs de Castelein (1485–1550), Ramakers explains, began to incorporate motifs from antique literature into his texts for *omkeringsfeesten*, which were originally manifestations of folk culture and local domain.<sup>52</sup>

In late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Northern Europe, the distinction of local artistic custom or a visual vernacular was made possible, at least in part, by the influx of a classicist, Italian art into the region; the community became aware of another, radically different, visual language. To paint in a local idiom, then, became a conscious choice; by the mid-sixteenth century, Northern artists were increasingly aware of their own artistic practices as such – Northern – in contrast, sometimes even in opposition, to the styles and/or subjects of art emerging out of Italy.<sup>53</sup>

Modern art historians have credited this influx of new Italian art into the Netherlands with what they perceive to be a tension between a more ornate, classicizing style of painting and a practice that rejected

<sup>49</sup> Gibson, “Artists and Rederijkers” 427, 435.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 446. See also Yvette Bruijnen, “De relatie tussen rederijkers en schilders te Leuven in de zestiende eeuw”, in Ramakers, B.A. (ed.), *Conformisten en Rebellen: Rederijkerscultuur in de Nederlanden, 1400–1650* (Amsterdam: 2003) 247–260.

<sup>51</sup> Ramakers B., *Spelen en Figuren: Toneelkunst en processiecultuur in Oudenaarde tussen Middeleeuwen en Moderne Tijd* (Amsterdam: 1996). See also Ramakers, “Bruegel en de rederijkers: Schilderkunst en literatuur in de zestiende eeuw”, *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 47 (1997) 80–105.

<sup>52</sup> Ramakers, *Spelen en Figuren* 123.

<sup>53</sup> In linguistic studies, Mikhail Bakhtin describes this as ‘inter-animation’, the idea that mixing languages encourages language consciousness and so linguistic and literary creativity. This language interaction reached its highest point in the sixteenth century. See Bakhtin M., *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: 1968) 81–82; Bakhtin M., *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) 41–83.

such models and looked instead to 'local traditions' for its inspiration.<sup>54</sup> These cultural encounters naturally influenced each other and created conflict and consciousness. Scholars argue that reactions to Italian style from Northern artists seem to be varied: some artists like Frans Floris wholeheartedly incorporated the new style into their work, while others such as Pieter Aertsen attempted to create a hybrid of the two traditions.<sup>55</sup> Pieter Bruegel the Elder is consistently assigned marquee status for a third category of artists who consciously rejected Italian art altogether and embraced local culture.

However, if the program for the cultivation of the vernacular language, which characterizes both the Pléiade in France and the rhetoricians societies in the Netherlands, is employed as a comparable phenomenon to the visual arts, a model emerges in which both classicist, Italianate forms and subject matters are mediated within a language, and not only does it remain vernacular, it also becomes a more enriched form of expression. Interestingly, this resonates with the model proposed by Dempsey for Martini and Botticelli, according to which the antique can only be imitated *through* the vernacular, and art and literature that bear the traces of life in the world constitute both the local and particular, *and* the universal and classical. Theater and the visual arts in the sixteenth-century Netherlands serve as a useful way to join past and present, Christian and pagan, Latin sources and vernacular usage.

Building on these ideas, more recent art historical studies have revisited the question of what attitudes Dutch artists adopted in this period toward the antique and Italian traditions, on the one hand, and toward native Dutch practices, rooted in the work of the 'Flemish Primitives', on the other.<sup>56</sup> As Ramakers argues in his contribution to this volume, the art of painting, it turns out, rest neither on pure passion for imitation nor on the persistent rejection of international trends, but was the result of a complex process of adaptation, in which old and new, familiar and foreign, were deliberately combined on various levels and toward multiple ends. Sixteenth-century Netherlandish

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<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Freedberg D., "Allusion and Topicality in the Work of Pieter Bruegel: The Implications of a Forgotten Polemic", in Freedberg D. (ed.), *The Prints of Pieter Bruegel the Elder* (Tokyo: 1989) 53–65.

<sup>55</sup> Meadow, "Bruegel's Procession to Calvary" 182.

<sup>56</sup> Richardson T.M., *Pieter Bruegel the Elder*; Weissert C., "Die kunstreichste Kunst der Künste". *Niederländische Malerei im 16. Jahrhundert* (Munich: 2011).



artists sought to harmonize different traditions with regard to time and origins, incidentally without disguising their diversity, or, if one prefers, their contradiction. On the contrary, the more or less recognizable hybridization of subjects, styles, and iconographies served the expression of a regional, cultural, and historical self-awareness.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, to make matters even more complex, by the end of the sixteenth century and especially in the seventeenth century, writers in almost all European regions began to react against this hybridization, or, as Peter Burke calls it, 'language mixing'.<sup>58</sup> These writers argued that in order to make the vernaculars more uniform and dignified, foreign words and certain forms of syntax and pronunciation must be rejected. Language had to be what might be described today as 'ethnically' pure, employing native expressions in the place of foreign ones. As a result, what some Renaissance writers considered to be an enrichment of the vernacular language was viewed by others as corruption. As Stephanie Porras argues in her recent article on the subject, particularly as it relates to Pieter Bruegel's peasant scenes, some Dutch writers advocated for the increased use and cultivation of their language by eliminating, not integrating, foreign words.<sup>59</sup> For example, the Antwerp lawyer Jan van de Werve condemned the corruption of Dutch by Romance words in his *Tresoor der Duitsche Tale* (1553), and argued for its increased use by appealing to the historic character of the language. 'Help me', he proclaims, 'to raise up our mother language (which now lies concealed in the earth like gold), so that we may prove how needless it is for us to beg for the assistance of other languages'.<sup>60</sup> Hendrik Spiegel argued against the use of French expressions such as *bon jour* in Dutch and against words of Latin origin, and suggested that if borrowing words had to take place at all, it should be from Germanic languages such as Danish, Frisian, or English.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of the concept of hybridity, see Burke P., *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge-Malden, MA: 2009).

<sup>58</sup> Burke P., *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: 2004), 141.

<sup>59</sup> Porras S., "Producing the Vernacular: Antwerp, Cultural Archaeology and the Bruegelian Peasant", *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 3, 1 (2011) [www.jhna.org](http://www.jhna.org) (accessed April 9, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> 'Helpt my ons moeders tal (die ghelijck goudt onder d'eerde leyt verborghen) wederom so brenghen op de beene, dat sy aen andere talen geen onderstant en behoeft te versoecken'. Author's foreword in Jan van der Werve, *Het Tresoor der Duytsscher Talen* (Antwerp: 1553). As cited in Porras, "Producing the Vernacular".

<sup>61</sup> Burke, *Languages and Communities* 148.

Increasingly, as Porras explains, a historical sense of Dutch identity was vested in linguistic and etymological research, as well as in the collection of vernacular cultural traditions.

Building on these complex ideas, our volume examines the conceptualization, strategies, and functions of both the cultivation of the vernacular and cultivation by the vernacular in early modern cultural production. Whether conceived of as a counter-strategy to international movements, as a return to the native past, or as a straightforward continuation and cultivation of vernacular traditions, 'the local' acts as a mark of distinction in the early modern cultural context. We take as a given that vernacular expression in early modern literature and art go beyond showing passive influence from other writers or artists, and have interpretative significance of their own.

### *The Essays*

Contributions to the volume cover four centuries of vernacular expression, from the early fourteenth to the seventeenth century. They do not focus on consistencies, but rather on change, and examine the transformative force of the vernacular over time and over different regions, as well as the way the concept of the vernacular itself shifts depending on the historical context. The essays are divided into three categories – 'Intersections', 'Method', and 'Identities'.

The contributions gathered under "Intersections" study the relationship between the visual arts and other cultures of vernacular expression, such as literary culture and music. Rather than making one form of cultural expression dependent on another, the essays paint a picture of intersections between verbal, tonal and visual language. They argue that the intersections of image, text and music usually happen at the moment when a culture tries to strengthen its basis in lived experience.

Jean Campbell's essay maps out the relationship between the vernacular and political bodies. It focuses on two formative moments in the history of that relationship: its point of origins, early in the fourteenth-century, in the poetic relationship between Simone Martini and Petrarch, and its point of reinvention, in the sixteenth century, with Vasari's 'Life of Simone'. In so doing, Campbell addresses the thorny question of style – of the relation of an artwork to the vernacular world

from which it arose – which she defines not so much as ‘entombed’ in Simone’s work but as a ‘technical engagement with nature’s body as a material medium, an engagement that is properly established not from a historical distance, but rather in the interpreter’s immediate embodied experience of its traces’. Such a lack of engagement with a particular historical moment made Simone’s work belong to a category of images that is better defined as ‘prepolitical’. Simone’s work, Campbell suggests, should be interpreted not so much from a historical distance but as an immediate bodily experience. This, she concludes, is how Vasari saw Simone’s work: as *disegno*, the prerequisite of the artwork rather than its final, historical product.

Jessica Buskirk examines Hans Memling’s *Maarten van Nieuwenhove Diptych* in comparison to works by two of his Bruges compatriots, the poet Anthonis de Roovere and the composer Jacob Obrecht. A close analysis of compositions by all three individuals in three different mediums reveals their similar efforts to intensify the audience’s experience of Marian devotion and self-consciously develop the work of their predecessors by building a bridge from the sacred realm of Latin prayer to the local, here-and-now of the audience. Vernacular language (De Roovere), illusionism (Memling), and references to popular music (Obrecht) are all mechanisms employed to intensify devotional practices by more effectively translating the Latin sources of their works into everyday reality.

Similarly, Lex Hermans defines the vernacular as an engagement with lived experience. Focusing on three different sixteenth-century descriptions of Donatello’s well-known fifteenth-century statue of *St. George*, Hermans shows how the vernacular language not only became a way of appropriating potentially classicizing artworks for an indigenous public, but also that the native tongue manages far better than, for example, Ciceronian Latin, to establish a direct communication between viewer/writer and artwork. In common with Campbell’s assessment of Simone’s art as prepolitical, Hermans, too, shows that statues like Donatello’s never fully register as historical objects belonging to one historical moment. The statue’s naturalism makes it transcend its status as object – as an artwork belonging to a specific moment in time – and enters the realm of life itself, a world in which it speaks and falls in love.

Bart Ramakers’s essay studies the comparison between words and images also taken up by Campbell and Hermans. Yet rather than taking the study of literature as a model to enrich the vernacular in the history

of art, Ramakers employs models developed in art history to elucidate the problem of the vernacular in literature. Literary research on the vernacular, says Ramakers, wrongly assumes the existence in the sixteenth century of a dichotomy between what is called a musical-poetic and a rhetorical-argumentative notion of literature. In art historical scholarship, especially scholarship on the Flemish artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder, on the other hand, such a dichotomy is not projected onto the sixteenth century; instead, art historians have argued for a more playful combination of vernacular and classical components in pictures, a combination that eventually shows an extremely self-reflexive kind of art. Ramakers discovers a similar kind of self-reflexivity in literature of the time. In common with the art of painting, sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Dutch vernacular literature is not so much based on slavish copying or epigonism, but on a complex process of adaptation, in which old and new, familiar and foreign, were deliberately combined. Ramakers's redefinition of the transformation of the vernacular in early modern Dutch literature allows for a hybrid text, in common with Ko's redefinition of Baldwin's *Beware the Cat*. Such a redefinition eventually allows for a reconfiguration of the relation between *ars* and *ingenium*. Whereas traditionally Latin was associated with *ars* – with learning – and *ingenium* with the inborn capacity to create, the vernacular tradition of Dutch literature could maintain that the Latin language, too, was inborn, and that it, like vernacular language, had been subject to change.

David Levine argues that in seventeenth-century Holland, the distinction between text and image was never that strong. The brush strokes of the Dutch painter Frans Hals are irregular, rough and they truncate visual information to an absolute minimum. Such an emphasis on abbreviation and an economic use of expressions, Levine submits, was also central to discussions about Dutch language at the time. Theorists of Dutch language – among them some of Hals's most important patrons – contended that its quick monosyllabic structure allowed for a directness and economy of expression matched by no other language, an argument formulated under the pressure of the Dutch war of independence against the Spanish. In seventeenth-century Holland, Levine concludes, art and literature aligned in order to formulate Dutch identity.

The idea that the vernacular constitutes a language – whether visual, textual or musical – able to ground culture in lived experience also informs the essays gathered under the second rubric, 'Method'. The

essays argue that this language of lived experience was not so much formulated as a style that exists in contrast to the classical idiom, but rather that the vernacular constitutes a method that was able to combine the classical with regional forms of expression as if there never was any difference between them. Whether in text or in image – the vernacular operates as a binder.

Focusing on William Baldwin's *Beware the Cat*, Trudy Ko's contribution studies the transformation of the vernacular through the textualization of the oral medium. Ko shows how, in Baldwin's work, the evocation of the oral tradition draws in regional accounts of history, accounts that lend the text an aura of verification. The vernacular operates here as a means to ground the text in actual lived experience. The world of the novel is one wherein 'regional details are shared through attempts to verify incredible events such as the death of a carnivorous, speaking prince of cats'. At the same time, Ko shows how *Beware the Cat* also explores the transformation of regional languages once these languages are trusted to paper. Rather than saying that the text offers a critique of vernacular modes of expression, as is common in Baldwin scholarship, Ko concludes that *Beware the Cat* is a remarkably self-reflexive text, combining the vernacular with other modes of expression in a surprisingly playful manner.

Alexandra Onuf's essay focuses on two series of prints published by Hieronymus Cock in 1559, now known as the Small Landscapes, in which for the first time humble rural settings were given center stage as the sole focus of printed images intended for a wider audience of art collectors and connoisseurs. As a result, argues Onuf, the prints initiate a new critical category of visual imagery she terms 'vernacular landscape'. In contrast to the universalizing tendencies of a classical idiom, the vernacular is characterized by an inherent instability, flexibility, and capacity for generative self-renewal and innovation. In this context, the Small Landscapes, including their reception and adaptation by later artists and publishers, provide a unique case study in which to reconsider the notion of the vernacular in relation to the visual arts, and redefine it in terms of method rather than style or subject matter.

Within this culture favoring the fluent combination of vernacular and classical forms of expression, the different origins of both were never truly forgotten. Early Modern European culture always remembered that what constituted a style or a method of expression was once born of specific historical and geographical needs. The essays gathered

under the rubric 'Identities' study the awareness of the origins of cultures as a means to fashion individual and geographical identity.

Jamie Smith identifies the vernacular origins of Jan van Eyck's Dutch motto *Als ich can* (as best as I can), which the painter inscribed on his self-portrait (*Man in a Red Turban* [London]) and other works. While art historians have related the phrase to an antique literary expression, *ut potui, non sicut volui* (as I could, not as I wished), Smith argues that van Eyck based his motto directly on a literary convention applied in the prologues of Middle Dutch texts. As a result, the artist aligned himself with the tradition of Flemish authors avowing the validity of their methods and extended vernacular discourse from Dutch literature to oil painting.

James Bloom addresses the false polemic between local and cosmopolitan artistic styles in the sixteenth-century Netherlands, constructed by modern art historians who juxtapose the works of Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Frans Floris. He does so by revisiting the notion of 'vernacularity' in relation to function and utility rather than to style and subject matter. In doing so, the author argues, attention is more productively focused on a process of cultural creation and transmission. Central to Bloom's thesis is the understanding of vernacular function within the spaces the paintings would have been viewed, particularly since the new interest in using paintings to adorn middle-class domestic interiors is itself an appropriation of courtly modes into the articulation of a specific indigenous experience.

Eelco Nagelsmit's contribution brings the question of the vernacular into the realm of architecture, where rules of classical decorum tend to be stricter than in the other plastic arts. Taking the Italian architect Sebastiano Serlio's sixth book on architecture as a case study, Nagelsmit shows how Serlio spent considerable effort to mitigate a classical style of architecture with local customs and ways of living. Interestingly, Nagelsmit not only focuses on Serlio's time in France – where a tension arose between a classical building style Serlio had brought with him from Italy and local, French customs – but also shows that French customs could be introduced into an Italian context as a *style*. In sixteenth-century architecture, style grew out of a local environment as fulfilling basic, local needs (climatic, comfort), and subsequently could be transported to foreign terrain, where it might lose its attachment to those needs and hence begin to operate exclusively as a style.

In her study of Delftware made between 1640–1720, Jing Sun focuses on specific ways artists borrowed from Chinese porcelain motifs and

styles and combined their foreign appearance with native Dutch characteristics and customs. This process transforms majolica, the primary indigenous form of pottery in the Netherlands prior to the arrival of Chinese porcelain, by making changes in materials, design, glazes, and firing process in order to appeal to consumers' attraction to the exotic, yet elegant aesthetic of the porcelain import. The result is the invention of a form of Chinoiserie, which assimilates Western and Oriental patterns to create a unique style specific to the Netherlands and subsequently becomes famous throughout Europe.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> We would like to thank Sophie van Romburgh for helping us formulate the idea of this book at an early stage, Willemijn Fock for commenting on one of the essays, and Erika Suffern for copy-editing the essays and the introduction.





## I. INTERSECTIONS



PETRARCH'S ITALY, SOVEREIGN POETRY  
AND THE HAND OF SIMONE MARTINI

C. Jean Campbell\*

Lyric poetry is a form of verbal materialism, and  
what does a writer have but some aspiring sounds,  
consonants and vowels, black markings lined up on  
a blank page, to imagine a world?

Edward Hirsch, *The Work of Lyric*, 2003

In the midst of an overtly political *canzone* lamenting the rending of  
Italy's fair body by factional warfare, Petrarch pleaded with her noble  
sons not to make an idol of a name without a subject:

Oh gentle Latin blood:  
release yourself from such harmful burdens;  
make not an idol of  
a vain name, without subject.  
If the fury from up there, that savage people  
conquers our intellect  
the sin is ours and not a natural thing.<sup>1</sup>

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\* This work has evolved over a number of years and has benefitted from my interactions with many different scholars. The first incarnation was as a conference paper, delivered at the symposium "Petrarch and the Arts" hosted by The Johns Hopkins University, the Baltimore Museum of Art, and the Peabody Conservatory in 2004. It was subsequently developed as a paper in progress for "Rethinking Word and Image", a seminar convened in 2005 by Leonard Barkan and Nigel Smith and the Folger Research Institute in Washington, DC. I am grateful not only to Professors Barkan and Smith, but also to the members of the seminar for their comments and suggestions. Finally, I want to thank the editors of the present volume, Joost Keizer and Todd Richardson, for providing an occasion to revisit its thesis under the appropriate rubric of vernacular expression and its early modern transformations.

<sup>1</sup> Petrarch, *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (henceforth RVF), in *The Canzoniere, or, Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, ed. M. Musa (Bloomington: 1996) no. 128, vv. 74–80: 'Latin sangue gentile: / sgombra da te queste dannose some, / non far idolo un nome / vano, senza soggetto; / ch 'l furor de lassù, gente ritrosa / vincerne d'intelletto / peccato è nostro, e non natural cosa'. The translations here and throughout are my adaptations of Musa.

Thus the poet whose allegiance famously belonged to the name Laura sought to distinguish his own self-consciously idolatrous poetic practice from the misguided factionalism of his noble countrymen.<sup>2</sup>

The operative difference here is the one between a name with a subject and a name without one. In the same *canzone*, Petrarch further differentiated his poetic practice from the harmful actions of the Italian lords, by pointing to the difference between idle gestures (or vacant signs) and those that are substantiated by their connection to nature's, and specifically Italy's, body. This distinction is evoked by means of an extended contrast between the empty gesture of the Bavarian mercenary who 'in raising his finger makes a game of death' (*alzando il dito colla morte scherzo*),<sup>3</sup> and the potentially legitimate, but as yet unfulfilled, gesture of the Italian lords, whom Petrarch urges to consider death and to turn their misspent time to study or, as he puts it: 'to some more worthy act of hand or intellect, to some beautiful praise'.<sup>4</sup> In this manner, claims the poet, 'joy is found here on earth and the pathway to heaven laid open'.<sup>5</sup>

The *canzone* in question, "Italia mia", is generally thought to have been composed during Petrarch's sojourn in Parma, in late 1344 or early 1345. The immediate historical backdrop for the imagery of empty idols and Italy's wounded body has been identified as the war between the Este lords of Ferrara and the Gonzaga lords of Mantua. Its poetic pretext – and the enterprise that surrounds it within the *Canzoniere* – was, of course, Petrarch's making of a different sort of idol in the figure of Laura. Within the *Canzoniere* this bloody political *canzone* follows a more typical idyllic one in which Petrarch describes himself wandering through the places of nature and finding reflected everywhere – in a leafy branch, in the fresh-fallen snow on the distant hills, in the stars, and so on – the face and the body of his lady.<sup>6</sup> As he

<sup>2</sup> On Petrarch and idolatry, see Freccero J., "The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch's Poetics", *Diacritics* 5 (1975) 34–40, Vickers N.J., "Re-membering Dante: Petrarch's 'Chiare, fresche et dolci acque'", *Modern Language Notes* 96 (1981) 1–11.

<sup>3</sup> Petrarch, *RVF* no. 28, v. 67.

<sup>4</sup> Petrarch, *RVF* no. 128, vv. 107–109: 'in qualche atto più degno / o di mano o d'ingegno / in qualche bella lode'.

<sup>5</sup> Petrarch, *RVF* no. 128, vv. 65–67: 'così qua giù si gode, / et la strada del ciel si trova aperto'.

<sup>6</sup> See Durling R., "Introduction" to *Petrarch's Lyric Poems* (Cambridge, MA: 1976) 21–24.

explains at the end of the first stanza: 'though I gaze intent and fixed on a thousand different things, I see only one lady, one fair face'.<sup>7</sup>

As Margaret Brose has argued in her study of Petrarch's use of the rhetorical figure of prosopopoeia (personification) in "Italia mia", 'the figuration of Italy as a vilified female body serves both to enable a specifically male poetic language and to justify the call for a rebirth of Italic political consciousness'.<sup>8</sup> Commenting on Kenelm Foster's characterization of Petrarch's political *canzone* (in contrast to Dante's lament of the divided Italy in *Purgatorio* 6.76–151), as 'subjective and lyrical throughout', Brose argues that the central project of the *canzone* is 'the construction of male subjectivity at the expense of female creativity'.<sup>9</sup> Brose's call to 're-materialize' the metaphor of Italy's body not only complicates the strictly neo-Platonic and idealizing interpretations of the figure of Laura, but also suggests substantial new grounds upon which to build an interpretation of the relation between Petrarch's Laura and the effigy he attributed to the hand of Simone Martini.

Charles Dempsey was certainly right to suggest that Petrarch's naming of Simone as the painter of Laura's heavenly beauty needs to be considered in light of the poet's engagement with vernacular poetry.<sup>10</sup> The suggestion is rich with possibility, but contains within it a number of problems of definition, foremost among them the question of 'vernacular style'. My intention in this paper is to broach a definition – not all at once, but in pieces, through circumspection – as a means of addressing the larger question of the relation between vernacular expression and political bodies. Because the question is substantial I will limit my purview to the relationship between two familiar characters, Petrarch and Simone Martini, and two well-known moments

<sup>7</sup> Petrarch, *RVF* no. 127, vv. 12–14: 'Dico che perch' io miri / mille cose diverse attento et fiso, / sol una donna veggio e 'l suo bel viso'.

<sup>8</sup> Brose M., "Petrarch's Beloved Body: 'Italia mia'", in Lomperis L. – Stanbury S. (eds.) *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, New Cultural Studies (Philadelphia: 1993) 1–20, esp. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Brose, "Petrarch's Beloved Body" 3, Foster K., *Petrarch, Poet and Humanist* (Edinburgh: 1984) 58–59.

<sup>10</sup> The suggestion first appears in Dempsey C., *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent* (Princeton: 1992) 183; and has recently been elaborated in Dempsey C., "The Importance of Vernacular Style in Renaissance Art: The Invention of Simone Martini's *Maestà* in the Palazzo Communale in Siena", in Cropper E. (ed.), *Dialogues in Art History from Mesopotamian to Modern: Readings for a New Century*, Studies in the History of Art 74 (Washington: 2009) 193–205.

in the history of that relationship: its point of origin in fourteenth-century Avignon, and its point of reinvention in sixteenth-century Florence. Significantly, both moments have a memorial character. In the first case, witnessed by the frontispiece for Petrarch's Vergil manuscript, the memorial has a personal foundation, which informs and lends substance to an emerging political consciousness. In this case, the political consciousness is constructed in opposition to official institutions. In the second case, witnessed by Giorgio Vasari's *vita* of Simone Martini, the memorializing project reflects the broadly cultural aspirations of a political regime. While my principal focus is the first of these moments, that focus necessitates the conscious recognition of the shaping force of the second – both on the first moment and on the discipline of art history in general. If the task at hand is to recover some sense of the value attached to the historical contingency of the style that Petrarch celebrated in his praise of Simone Martini, the challenge remains that Petrarch, in commemorating that style, transposed the historical moment of its making into a point of reflection.

Let me begin by rehearsing the primary evidence. We know from Petrarch's own testimony that the figure of Laura was associated with the *mano*, or hand, of the Sienese painter Simone Martini. The association is intriguing partly because the painter spent the final years of his life (from approximately 1336 to 1344), along with the Florentine poet, in the orbit of the papal court at Avignon. There are various references to the relation between Simone's art and Petrarch's Laura as it evolved in those years. They include the two famous sonnets in which Petrarch ascribes to Simone's hand a portrait of Laura. The first of the two sonnets describes the inspired vision (figured as a trip to Paradise) that allowed Simone to see and testify to a beauty that was beyond the perceptual powers of the sculptor Polyclitus and his ancient fellows.

No matter how hard Polyclitus looked,  
like all the others famous for that art,  
not in a thousand years could they see even a small part  
of the beauty that has conquered my heart.

But certainly my Simone was in Paradise,  
the place from which that gentle lady comes.  
He saw her up there and traced her *in carte*  
to give faithful testimony down here of her beautiful face.

The work is of the sort that only in the heavens  
could be imagined, not here with us  
where our [bodily] members make a veil for the soul;

a gracious deed which he could not have done  
 once he came down to feel the heat and cold  
 and his eyes felt their own mortality.<sup>11</sup>

The second sonnet describes the limitations of Simone's work, and its inability to respond to Petrarch's desire – a desire not only for loving conversation, but also for the sort of erotic intercourse that, in Petrarch's reckoning, Pygmalion had been granted a thousand times over.

When Simone first received the lofty idea  
 which put the stylus in his hand in my name,  
 if he had given that gentle work not only figure  
 but also voice and intellect,  
  
 he might have freed my breast of the many sighs  
 that make what others cherish vile to me.  
 For in appearance she seems humble,  
 promising me peace in her very aspect,  
  
 but then when I come to speak to her  
 she kindly appears to listen to me:  
 if only she could answer to my words.  
  
 Pygmalion, how happy you should be  
 with your image, since a thousand times  
 you have had that for which I yearn.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the two sonnets celebrating Simone's portrayal of Laura, we have the lines from the third book of the *Secretum* wherein Augustinus chides Franciscus for the persistence of his obsession, not only with Laura's effigy (or likeness) but also with a pictorial substitute:

And what could be more senseless than, not content with the present  
 effigy of her face, the cause of all your woes, you insist on obtaining a

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<sup>11</sup> Petrarch, *RVF* no. 77: 'Per mirar Policleto a prova fiso / con gli altri ch'ebber fama di quell'arte, / mill'anni non vedrian la minor parte / della beltà che m'ave il cor conquiso. // Ma certo il mio Simon fu in Paradiso / onde questa gentil donna si parte; / ivi la vide, et la ritrasse in carte / per far fede qua giù del suo bel viso. // L'opra fu ben di quelle che nel cielo / si ponno imaginar, non qui tra noi, / ove le membra fanno a l'alma velo; // cortesia fe', né la potea far poi / che ful disceso a provar caldo et gielo / et del mortal sentiron gli occhi suoi.'

<sup>12</sup> Petrarch, *RVF* no. 78: 'Quando giunse a Simon l'alto concetto / ch'mio nome gli pose in man lo stile, / s'avesse dato a l'opera gentile / colla figura voce ed intelletto, // di sospir molti mi sgombrava il petto / che ciò ch'altri à più caro a me fan vile. / Però che 'n vista ella si monstra umile, / promettendomi pace ne l'aspetto, // ma poi ch'i' vengo a ragionar con lei, / benignamente assai par che m'ascolte: / se risponder sapesse a' detti miei! // Pigmalion, quanto lodar ti dei / de l'immagine tua, se mille volte / n'avesti quel ch' i' sol una vorrei!'

counterfeit [of it] from the *ingenium* of a famous artist, that you may carry it everywhere with you, to have an everlasting spring of tears, fearing, I suppose, lest otherwise their fountain might dry up?<sup>13</sup>

Although Simone isn't explicitly named here, it is often assumed, on the evidence of the sonnets, that he is the famous artist to whom Augustinus refers. What matters here is not so much the determination of the unnamed author of the treasured counterfeit, but rather the fact that both the castigating Augustinus and the amorous, idolatrous Franciscus represent aspects of Petrarch's position, and of the perspective that informed his account of the modern origins, in Simone's art, of vernacular style.

Finally, in a cryptic note that is not generally discussed in relation to the figure of Laura, Petrarch compares Simone to Apelles. The note appears as one of the marginal glosses in the poet's Pliny manuscript, the book that counterbalanced the preponderant weight of Augustine's *Confessions* as Petrarch composed his reflections on the figural arts.<sup>14</sup> The notation, which reads 'and so was, of late, our most delightful Simone of Siena', appears beside Pliny's description of Apelles' *comitas*, or courtesy of manners, and suggests that Simone was possessed of a similarly courteous character.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the comparison between Apelles and Simone has a more specific force than this, a force that has to do with an evolving representation of the relation between the poet and the painter dispersed throughout Petrarch's various writings.

The marginal notation in the Pliny manuscript is only one of several places – and the most informal – where Petrarch identifies Simone as

<sup>13</sup> Petrarch, *Secretum*, ed. E. Carrara, in *Prose*, ed. G. Martellotti, La letteratura italiana: storia e testi 7 (Milan: 1955) book 3, p. 156: 'Quid autem insanius quam, non contentum presenti illius vultus effigie, unde hec cuncta tibi provenerant, aliam fictam illustris artificis ingenio quesivisse, quam tecum ubique circumferens haberes materiam semper immortalium lacrimarum?' Translation adapted from *Petrarch's Secret or the Soul's Conflict with Passion: Three Dialogues between Himself and S. Augustine*, trans. W.H. Draper (London: 1911; reprint, Westport, CT: 1978) 134.

<sup>14</sup> Bettini M., "Tra Plineo e sant'Agostino: Francesco Petrarca sulle arti figurative", in Settis S. (ed.), *Memoria dell'antico nell'arte italiana*, vol. 1, *L'uso dei classici* (Turin: 1984) 221–267.

<sup>15</sup> 'haec fuit et Symoni nostro senensi nuper iocundissima'. See Campbell C.J., "'Symoni nostro senensi nuper iocundissima': The Court Artist: Heart, Mind and Hand", in Campbell S.J. (ed.), *Artists at Court: Image-Making and Identity, 1300–1550* (Boston: 2005) 33–45, 203–206. For a reproduction of the page from the Pliny manuscript with a brief discussion of Petrarch's gloss, see Baxandall M., *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, Oxford-Warburg Studies (Oxford: 1971) 63 and Plate I.



a modern painter whose example is comparable to that of an ancient artist. A second instance is to be found in a letter to Petrarch's friend Guido Sette, archdeacon of Genoa. There the analogy appears as part of Petrarch's answer to the question of how the works of ugly people may in fact be beautiful: 'To move now from the ancients to new things, and from foreign artists to our own, I know of two outstanding painters who were not handsome: Giotto, a Florentine citizen [...] and Simone of Siena'.<sup>16</sup>

To elucidate the figure of the 'new painter', it helps to consider Petrarch's alignment of modern characters with the ancient personas of Pliny's tale of Apelles and Campaspe, which immediately follows Petrarch's gloss on the description of Apelles' courtesies of manners. The comparison of Simone with Apelles has sometimes been used as evidence of Simone's place in the papal court at Avignon, but there is no evidence to suggest that the Sienese painter held an official position at court. In fact, a consideration of the larger context within which Petrarch's comments are situated suggests that the membership to which he alluded was not an official appointment at the papal court. It had to do more directly with an intimate, unofficial 'court' that the poet associated with the Vacluse, a place that served as his refuge from Avignon. It bears remembering here that Petrarch not only called Avignon 'Babylon', but also imagined that city as the place toward which 'the mountain closing this valley [the Vacluse] most [...] had its face turned in natural disgust'.<sup>17</sup> The relation of Petrarch's poetic enterprise to the official center is one of indirect confrontation.

The lineaments of the membership that the poet imagined are discernible in his interpolation of Simone's character into Pliny's tale of Apelles, Alexander, and Campaspe. In a nutshell, that tale relates how Apelles, having been asked to paint a nude portrait of Alexander's favorite mistress, Campaspe, fell in love with the lady in the process of painting her. According to Pliny, Alexander, having witnessed this development, decided to give his mistress to the painter in an act of

<sup>16</sup> Petrarch, *Rerum familiarium libri*, in *Le Familiari*, ed. V. Rossi, trans. U. Bosco, 4 vols. (Florence: 1968; reprint, Florence: 1997) book 5, no. 17.44–47: 'Atque ut a veteris ad nova, ab externis ad nostra transgrediar, duos ego novi pictoris egregios, nec formosus: Iottum, florentinum civum [...] et Simonem senensem'. Translation from *Letters on Familiar Matters*, trans. A.S. Bernardo, vol. 3, *Rerum familiarium libri XVII–XXIV* (Albany: 1975).

<sup>17</sup> Petrarch, *RVF* no. 117, vv. 1–3: 'Se 'l sasso ond' è più chiusa questa valle / [...] / tenesse vòlto per natura schiva'.

generosity and affection for the painter. In the bargain, both the painting and the mistress became material signs of an exchange through which a leveling bond of friendship was achieved between the painter and his sovereign. In aligning Simone with Apelles at the outset of this passage of the *Natural History*, Petrarch suggests a couple of things: first, that the Sienese painter was, like Apelles, a courtly character endowed with *comitas*; and, second, that Simone owed his place at court, so to speak, to an act of painting associated with erotic enthrallment.

Both implicitly here and explicitly in the sonnets, where Petrarch claims that Simone's hand represented his lady, Simone is cast as the painter who, like Apelles, falls in love with the lady he paints. While the carnal aspect of the love relationship described in the sonnets may not be immediately obvious, there is no doubt about the erotic implications of Petrarch's interpretation of Pliny's tale. Following one line of reasoning, it might be concluded that Petrarch has cast himself in the role of Alexander, but the economy he describes involves more than a simple substitution. Whereas, in Pliny's anecdote, both the mistress and her portrait were ultimately relegated to the sidelines of the central relationship – the friendship between Apelles and Alexander – the poetic society constituted by the intersection of Petrarch's desire and Simone's painting locates its sovereign in an erotically charged encounter with an image of the absent female beloved – a name with an absent subject.

The association of the figure of the 'new painter' – not foreign and distant, but native and familiar – relates to the forging of a sort of poetic society that might succeed (where the Italian princes were failing) to heal the body of Italy. It also has to do with a poetic enterprise that made an idol out of Laura, the evergreen source of poetry. Finally, the identification of Simone as a 'new painter' has to do with Petrarch's ambivalent relation to vernacular poetic culture in general, and to Dante specifically. Petrarch expresses this ambivalence most vividly in a letter addressed to his friend Boccaccio explaining why he regards as folly his own youthful choice to follow Dante's style and write in the vernacular.<sup>18</sup> Using Dante as his example, Petrarch laments how, on account of their accessibility to the masses, the noble verses of his great predecessor have been mangled and misused. Even as he wrote such letters, however, Petrarch continued to polish the

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<sup>18</sup> Petrarch, *Rerum familiarium libri* book 21, no. 15.

sonnets that he collected together in the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, his monumental vernacular songbook. The dilemma for Petrarch was that the vernacular style that was so susceptible to mispronunciation and corruption by the vulgar masses was also the living and changeable language of love songs (not to mention popular remembrance). It was, in other words, the language that conveyed the very substance of the intimate relations that he so desired.<sup>19</sup>

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that, for Petrarch, Simone occupied a privileged position in the lineage of Italian vernacular poets, but it remains unclear what, if anything, Simone's art brought to Petrarch's representation of poetic sovereignty. This is a version of a question that has been posed often enough, for example, by John Rowlands, who suggested that the lyrical character of Simone's art made it an appropriate vehicle for Petrarch's vision of Laura. In explaining why Giotto would not have been up to the challenge of representing Petrarch's lady, Rowlands observes that: 'there could never have been that affinity of feeling that prevailed between the aging artist (namely, Simone) and the young poet, who were creators of a lyrical disposition in their own particular medium'.<sup>20</sup> If there is something to be recovered from such observations, it is something that has proven very difficult to articulate. Rowlands, himself, fell silent on the issue, leaving his readers to fill the critical gap between the description of Simone's 'lyric disposition' and a seductive detail of Simone's Uffizi *Annunciation* of 1333 [Fig. 1]. He stopped short of pursuing, as a question of style, what he understood to be an essential aesthetic affinity between Petrarch's art and Simone's. What attempts there have been to explain how the style or idiom of Simone's art might relate to Petrarch's poetic enterprise, tend either to rely on old categories in the history of style, or to retreat to the ground of national constants.

In his book on Botticelli's *Primavera*, Charles Dempsey laid the groundwork for a reconsideration of Simone's art in relation to vernacular style. Having posed the question of what myth or 'true reality'

<sup>19</sup> For an expanded discussion with bibliography, see Campbell, C.J., "Simone Martini, Petrarch and the Vernacular Poetics of Early Renaissance Art", in Cropper E. (ed.), *Dialogues in Art History from Mesopotamian to Modern: Readings for a New Century*, Studies in the History of Art 74 (Washington: 2009). See also Vickers, "Remembering Dante" 1–11; Menocal M.R., *Shards of Love: Exile and the Origins of the Lyric* (Durham, NC-London: 1994) 176–181.

<sup>20</sup> Rowlands J., "Simone Martini and Petrarch: a Virgilian Episode", *Apollo* n.s. 81 (1965) 264.



Fig. 1. Simone Martini, "Annunciate Virgin", detail of *Annunciation with Saints*, painted for Siena Cathedral (1333). Tempera on wood, 184 × 210 cm. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi. © Scala / Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali / Art Resource, New York

is expressed in the *Primavera*, Dempsey turned at the very end of his book to the 'question of style itself', defining style as the 'vehicle and concrete manifestation of the beauty revealed by the new concept of love'.<sup>21</sup> He emphasized the rootedness of Botticelli's style – and vernacular style in general – in history, laying out a genealogy of vernacular pictorial style within which Simone occupies a prominent place. Identifying Simone as 'the painter of the idea of beauty that Petrarch had figured in Laura', Dempsey described the Sienese painter's art as 'the highest expression of an Angevin courtly style'.<sup>22</sup>

The point is well taken. There is no question that Simone's art, which was cultivated in the rich ground of cultural interchange between the Angevin court and the cities of central Italy in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, partakes of the refinements of contemporary French court art, both literary and pictorial.<sup>23</sup> That art saw an extraordinary blossoming in the *Maestà* that Simone painted in 1315/16 (and repainted in 1321) for the council hall of the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena [Fig. 2]. As Dempsey observes, Simone's *Maestà* is remarkable for audaciously transforming the typical Sienese Virgin – modestly veiled and of generally Byzantine lineage – into a golden-tressed lady of recent and distinctly French lineage.

Dempsey's suggestion that Petrarch identified with a set of descriptive conventions derived from the contemporary vernacular translations of the *descriptio pulchritudinis*, which he shared with the Sienese painter, is a viable starting point. Yet it only takes us so far in discerning the value that Petrarch ascribed to Simone's hand. Certainly that value did not attach to the Angevin political context of Simone's *Maestà*. The objectified conventions of description that Dempsey recognized in Simone's Virgins are among the concrete manifestations of a thoroughly embodied and subjectively grounded creative impulse that is also discernible in Simone's abiding concern with the materials, instruments, and processes of art-making.

That concern is summarized in the clothing of the angel Gabriel in the Uffizi *Annunciation*, one of the most breathtaking moments in the history of art [Fig. 3]. Here Simone, the painter, adopted the

<sup>21</sup> Dempsey, *Portrayal of Love* 183.

<sup>22</sup> Dempsey, *Portrayal of Love* 183.

<sup>23</sup> Dempsey, "Importance of Vernacular Style", 193–205. Dempsey provides an insightful review of the major contributions to the question of Simone's innovations in the Palazzo Pubblico *Maestà*.





Fig. 2. Simone Martini, *Maestà*, in the Sala del Mappamondo of the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, (1315–1316). Fresco, 763 × 970 cm. © Scala / Art Resource, New York



Fig. 3. Simone Martini, "Archangel Gabriel", detail of *Annunciation with Saints*, painted for Siena Cathedral (1333). Tempera on wood, 184 × 210 cm. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi. © Scala / Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali / Art Resource, New York

tools of the goldsmith (punch, engraving tool, and burnisher) to counterfeit the diverse products of the weaver's craft. The resulting effects include the rectilinear 'weave' of Gabriel's tartan cloak, which Simone produced by scratching into the gesso ground of the panel, and the ornate patterning of Gabriel's robe, where the painter reproduced, with a goldsmith's punch, the texture of a particular sort of Lucchese silk known as *lampasso*. While Simone's technical virtuosity has been amply studied, and is generally recognized as a defining feature of his art, it is rarely considered within the question of meaning.<sup>24</sup>

Simone's engagement with the materials, instruments, and products of artisanal practice may be traced all the way back to the Palazzo Pubblico *Maestà*, his spectacular entry into the realm of Sienese civic art. Here, underwriting the many artisanal masks – goldsmith, glazer, and lapidary among them – that Simone adopted for the pictorial praise of the Virgin, we find a key figure: the notary or scribe. In the lower framework of the fresco, adopting the notarial formula *a mano di* (by the hand of), Simone named his witnessing agency. This fragmentary signature, laboriously punched with small tools into the leather-hard plaster in a manner that imitates monumental epigraphy, originally appeared on a plaster surface that had been painted to mimic a porphyry plaque. It should be read in conjunction with the verses above it in the painting's framework, which still have their pseudo-porphry ground. The upper inscription, which is also fragmentary and written in the local vernacular, may be reconstructed to read: 'Thirteen hundred and fifteen [has] turned, and Delia has thrust forth every beautiful flower, and June was already proclaiming "I have returned"'.<sup>25</sup> Taken together, the inscriptions constitute a lyric description of origins, proclaiming Simone's relation, as witness, to the living source in nature. The relation thus portrayed is, however, neither straightforward nor stable.

Simone's art engages in the sort of lyric materialism that emerged in the notarial culture of late-medieval Italy, first in Franciscan circles (with the production and reception of the *chartula* of Saint Francis) and then among the poets of the *stil novo*. Having discussed elsewhere

<sup>24</sup> See Hoeniger C.S., "The Painting Technique of Simone Martini" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1989); Hoeniger C.S., "Cloth of Gold and Silver: Simone Martini's Techniques for Representing Luxury Textiles", *Gesta* 30 (1991) 154–162.

<sup>25</sup> 'MILLE TRECENTO QUINDICI VOL [...] / E DELIA AVIA OGNI BEL FIOR SPINTO / ET JUNO GIA GRIDAVA IMI RIVOL'.



the generic relation of Simone's art to the *chartula*, a foundational piece of poetic correspondence written in the vernacular, I will turn my attention here to the lyric practices of the poets of the *stil novo*, especially Guido Cavalcanti.<sup>26</sup> In a sonnet that has drawn considerably more attention from modern novelists and poets than it has from a more strictly academic community, Cavalcanti lent a voice to his writing implements:

We are the sad, distraught pens,  
the scissors and the sorrowing little knife,  
who have written woefully  
the words that you have heard.

Let us now tell you why we have come out  
and up to you here in the present:  
the hand who moved us says that it feels  
frightful things appearing in its heart;

which have injured it so gravely  
that it is brought close to death,  
so close that only sighs remain.

Now we pray most fervently  
that, insofar as you view us with pity,  
you will not disdain to take us up.<sup>27</sup>

Summarizing the effects of Cavalcanti's sonnet, and pointing to the disjunction between the sorrowful words and their musical effect of 'extraordinary lightness', Italo Calvino identifies with the modernity of Cavalcanti's gesture of giving over the voice of the sonnet to the

<sup>26</sup> Campbell C.J., *The Commonwealth of Nature: Art and Poetic Community in the Age of Dante* (University Park, PA: 2008) 87–90. On the *chartula* and its relation to notarial culture, see Abbondanza R. (ed.), *Il notariato a Perugia: Mostra documentaria e iconografica per il XVI Congresso nazionale del notariato, Perugia, maggio-luglio 1967*, Fonti e strumenti per la storia del notariato italiano 1 (Rome: 1973) cat. no. 221, fig. 42.

<sup>27</sup> Cavalcanti, Guido, *Rime*, ed. M. Ciccuto (1978), 7th ed., BUR Poesia (Milan: 2006) no. 18: 'Noi sian le triste penne isbigotite, / le cesoiuzze e 'l coltellin dolente, / ch'avemo scritte dolorosamente / quelle parole che vo' avete udite. // Or vi diciàn perché noi sian partite / e sian venute a voi qui di presente: / la man che ci movea dice che sente / cose dubbiose nel cor apparite; / le quali hanno destrutto sì costui / ed hannol posto sì presso a la morte, / ch'altro non v'è rimasto che sospiri. / Or vi preghiàn quanto possian più forte / che non sdegn[i]ate di tenerci noi, / tanto ch'un poco di pietà vi miri.' On the sonnet and its place in Cavalcanti's work, see Gorni G., "Una silloge d'autore nelle rime del Cavalcanti", in *Alle origine dell' Io lirico: Cavalcanti o dell'interiorità*, Critica del testo 4.1 (Rome: 2001) 23–39. My thanks to Christopher Nygren for pointing me to this sonnet.

instruments that made it: 'With these verses Guido Cavalcanti opens modern poetry. He opens it, and he closes it. After him, poets prefer to forget that while they write they are writing and not doing something else'.<sup>28</sup>

Without taking up the question of Cavalcanti's modernity, I would argue that Calvino's insights go to the very heart of the question at hand, which concerns the shifting status of the lyrical 'I' in late-medieval vernacular poetry.<sup>29</sup> In concert, the projection of the poet's voice onto the writing instruments, the multiplication of the instruments, and the splitting of the sensible content of the words from their sensory effects serve to make the 'I' of the sonnet both palpable and at the same time impossible to pin down or circumscribe as an objective entity. The 'I' of Cavalcanti's sonnet is a creature very much like Dante's illustrious vernacular, the elusive panther he hunts but cannot finally catch in the *De vulgari eloquentia*. As the words that Cavalcanti puts in the mouths of his 'sad, distraught pens' clearly indicate, what was at stake in such suspensions was a matter of life and death. While the poet's hand has reached the very brink of death, his instruments go out and 'up to the present' to plead the case on his behalf.

Both Cavalcanti's tactics, and the status of the lyrical 'I' in the resulting sonnets, shed light on the function of the vernacular inscriptions in Simone's *Maestà*. While Simone's fiction may suggest the permanence of an epitaph, that permanence is patently illusory. Despite appearances, Simone's name only appears to be written in stone. In other words, the vitality that the painter's *mano* represents is never finally entombed within Simone's practice. It lives on through an insistent technical engagement with nature's body as a material medium, an engagement that is properly established not from a historical distance, but rather in the interpreter's immediate embodied experience of its traces.

For his part, Petrarch simultaneously claimed the position of interpreter with relation to Simone's art and also produced an image that was subject to his own complex practice of poetic idolatry. As Calvino observes in describing the birth and death of the modern poetic tra-

<sup>28</sup> Calvino I., "The Pen in the First Person: For the Drawings of Saul Steinberg", in *The Uses of Literature* (San Diego-New York-London: 1986) 291-292.

<sup>29</sup> See Stone G.B., *The Death of the Troubadour: The Late Medieval Resistance to the Renaissance* (Philadelphia: 1994); Kay S., *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry* (Cambridge-New York: 1990).

dition that he associates with Cavalcanti – and that I associate with Simone Martini – later poets preferred to forget that they were writing. Petrarch, he notes, ‘pretends to believe he is walking in the open countryside, overwhelmed by suffering and anguish, whereas he is actually seated comfortably in his study, with his cat on his lap, as he contentedly polishes his verses’.<sup>30</sup> Calvino’s description of Petrarch’s pretense is apt, but it also evades the substance of that pretense. When Petrarch suggested that Simone’s *stile* represented the vital and informing potential of the new poetic arts, he was, in a sense, reiterating and giving a face and a name to a proposition that had been articulated time and again within Simone’s own practice.

An important aspect of the relation between Simone’s art and Petrarch’s poetry can be recuperated on precisely these grounds by revisiting a sense of the term *style* that gradually fell away in early modern usage, namely, its association with an instrument (the *stylus*) and its application to the practices of painters and poets. It may be a simple truth that words like *style* and *manner* derive etymologically from words associated with acts of making. However, as Philip Sohm has observed, this is a truth that early modern ‘definers [of pictorial style] wanted to avoid, because the *mano* of *maniera* could also be construed as a reference to craft and manual production, associations that artists had fought long and hard to overcome’.<sup>31</sup> The social and economic concerns involved in the avoidance of associations with manual production are well established, and belong to the narrative that sees Renaissance artists emerging as courtiers and intellectuals. Yet the moves through which terms like *style* came to be associated with the realm of ideas, and thereby ultimately with metaphysics (and apparently stable aesthetic categories), also mask a deeper set of concerns having to do with imitative practice, subjectivity, and its regulation.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Calvino, “Pen in First Person” 292.

<sup>31</sup> Sohm P.L., *Style in the art theory of early modern Italy* (Cambridge-New York: 2001) 74–75. Furthering this general point, and referring to the semantic exploration of the derivation of the Italian term *stile* from the word for the writing instrument, Sohm observes that: ‘No definition of pictorial style explicitly recalls its etymology until the eighteenth century’ (153).

<sup>32</sup> Cropper E., “The Place of Beauty in the High Renaissance and its Displacement in the History of Art”, in Vos A. (ed), *Place and Displacement in the Renaissance*, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies 132 (Binghamton: 1995), Williams R., *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy: From Techne to Metatechne* (Cambridge-New York: 1997).

Where considerations of vernacular style in the Italian context are concerned, two early moments are particularly important. The first, which I have already described, belongs to a time that came long before any formalized effort to establish a canonical vernacular that would supersede all the others as a literary language. This was the moment when Simone's hand became subject to Petrarch's amorous perspective. The second moment – which is closely associated with the articulation of the *questione della lingua* and Pietro Bembo's proposal of a preeminent Italian vernacular rooted in the 'Tuscan' writings of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio – consists in Giorgio Vasari's articulation of *disegno* as a sovereign paradigm governing the practices of painting, sculpture, and architecture. In its reception, as Georges Didi-Huberman explains, Vasari's paradigm would 'confer on all these practices with crushed pigments, rough-hewn blocks, and masonry walls the prestige of an Idea'.<sup>33</sup> In so doing, it would also make the two moments under discussion look more similar in retrospect than they were in their respective presents.

It is neither possible nor desirable to undo the effects of Vasari's perspective on the formation of the discipline of art history. However, the recognition of those effects allows us to confront them and find new understanding. In fact, one of the conclusions of recent scholarship on sixteenth-century Italian art and theory might be that Vasari's *disegno* deserves consideration as a species of portrait, in light of the question of beauty as an effect, not just an idea, in sixteenth-century Italian art. Following this line of thinking, and observing that Vasari's *disegno* is 'tantamount to a specified or instrumental term' for imitation, Didi-Huberman suggests: 'If the mother goddess were to have a favorite attribute or emblem it would be a stylus that knows how to draw'.<sup>34</sup> As Didi-Huberman notes, Vasari himself was not seeking, as later writers would, 'to obscure the technical associations of *disegno*'. He was rather making use of equivocation to elide the difference between the graphic sign and the idea, and thereby to produce, under the name *disegno*, the aspect of a 'sovereign paradigm'.<sup>35</sup>

Paraphrasing Vasari's definition of the term *disegno*, as given in the technical prefaces to the *Lives*, and comparing it with Cennino Cen-

<sup>33</sup> Didi-Huberman G., *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. J. Goodman (University Park, PA: 2005) 80–81.

<sup>34</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images* 81.

<sup>35</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images* 81.

nini's use of the same term around 1400 in *Il libro dell'arte*, Didi-Huberman observes that Vasari reversed the trajectory implied in the description of the relationship between hand and mind given by Cennino. Whereas for Cennino *disegno* was a 'material practice capable of occupying the painter's whole head', in Vasari's account, *disegno* took on the appearance of an 'ideal concept that takes shape in the intellect to invest, under an *apparente espressione*, the subjectile of the painter' (or what the painting subject 'throws onto the support').<sup>36</sup> Thus described, the difference between Cennino's understanding of *disegno* and Vasari's is not one of polar opposition. It must be remembered, first of all, that Vasari's understanding of the term *disegno* is flexible.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, even when he offers something like a definition, he does not simply equate *disegno* with an idea. He rather presents an analogy, explaining that *disegno*, 'proceeding from the intellect, is like a form or, indeed, an idea of all the things of nature'.<sup>38</sup> Finally, as Didi-Huberman is at pains to emphasize, Vasari's *disegno* never loses its technical associations. While having the appearance of an idea, it is also a practice, which partakes of judgment, and is profoundly historical.

Here Robert Williams's proposal that Vasari understands *disegno* as a metatechne, a skill or practice involved in the aspiration to cultural superintendency, is particularly helpful.<sup>39</sup> Viewed in this light, the difference between Cennino's understanding of *disegno* and Vasari's also appears to be a matter of scope. On one hand, Cennino's concerns were focused, figuratively speaking, within the walls of the workshop,

<sup>36</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images* 81.

<sup>37</sup> See Williams, *Art, Theory and Culture* 29–72, who carefully parses Vasari's use of the term.

<sup>38</sup> Vasari, Giorgio, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architettori*, ed. G. Milanesi, 9 vols. (Florence: 1906; reprint, Florence: 1988) 1:168–169. Emphasis added. The definition, in full, reads as follows: 'Perchè il disegno, padre delle tre arti nostre, Architettura, Scultura e Pittura, procedendo dall'intelletto cava di molte cose un giudizio universale; simile a una forma ovvero idea di tutte le cose dalla natura, la quale è singolarissima nelle sue misure; di qui è che non solo nei corpi umani e degli animali, ma nelle piante ancora e nelle fabbriche e sculture e pitture, conosce la proporzione che ha il tutto con le parti, e che hanno le parti fra loro e col tutto insieme. E perchè da questa cognizione nasce un certo concetto e giudizio, che si forma nella mente quella tal cosa che poi espresso con le mani si chiama disegno; si può concludere che esso disegno alto non sia che una apparent espressione e dichiarazione del concetto che si ha nell'animo, e di quello che altri si è nato nella mente immaginato e fabbricato nell'idea'.

<sup>39</sup> Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture* 1–28.

and pertained to the moral inclinations, education, and regulation of the practices its members. There is no doubt that Cennino's project had a genealogical dimension, which consisted of the promotion of a legitimate, artisanal lineage. The lineage he envisioned was highly localized and overtly based on his own practical example, which he traced through the Florentine workshops of Agnolo and Taddeo Gaddi to Giotto as a paternal figure. Vasari's concerns, while embracing their foundations in workshop practices, extended outward to the realm of the broadly encompassing cultural-political practices associated with the Medici grand-duchy, and made claims to what Williams calls the superintendency of knowledge.

The differences between Cennino's and Vasari's understandings of *disegno* move us one step closer to understanding the value assigned by Petrarch to Simone's practice, partly because they point generally in the direction of what might be called the prepolitical (not nonpolitical) foundations in practice of local, vernacular style, and partly because the articulation of those differences helps us to recover the submerged understanding of style as instrument within this tradition.

Whether or not Petrarch identified with the set of objectified properties that have been recognized in modern art history as Simone's style, the fact remains that he expressly identified with Simone's *stile*, or stylus. This identification occurs in the second of the two sonnets describing Simone's portrait of Laura where the poet claims 'the lofty idea[...] put the stylus in his hand in my name'. While there is no reason to doubt that Petrarch had such an effigy somehow in his possession, something about Petrarch's perception of Simone's art is necessarily lost in the attempt to reconstruct a coherent object from his account.<sup>40</sup> What Petrarch describes in the sonnets is not an accomplished or singular object. His designation of the material support with the plural form *carte* is just one indication that he is not speaking of a delimited thing.<sup>41</sup> What Petrarch describes is an unfolding process involving the painter's agency (the operations of his imagination and

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<sup>40</sup> For a history of the 'reconstructions', see Trapp J.B., "Petrarch's Laura: The Portraiture of an Imaginary Beloved", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 64 (2001) 55–192. For the importance of the tradition for sixteenth-century Italian portrayals of beauty, see Cropper E., "The Beauty of Women: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture", in Ferguson M.W. – Quilligan M. – Vickers N.J. (eds.), *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago-London: 1986) 175–190.

<sup>41</sup> My thanks to Renzo Baldasso for noting the plural form and its implications.

hand) with material support (*carte*) and with an instrument (*stile*), which he shares with the poet.

Petrarch's identification of the instrument as a stylus bears further consideration, because it offers a point of access to the question of the painter's *ingenium*. For poets and painters alike, the stylus was the instrument that belonged to the level of practice and composition. For poets it was the implement used to inscribe wax tablets during the formative stages of composition.<sup>42</sup> According to Cennino, who was writing as the conveyor of Giotto's workshop practices, the stylus had a similar place in the practice of painters. The process in which the stylus was involved is laid out in some detail in the first part of *Il libro dell'arte*. Having described the preparation of the boxwood tablet that will provide the material support, Cennino proceeds to describe the apprentice's first application of the stylus to the prepared surface: 'Then, with a model [before you] begin to draw easy things as much as possible to train your hand, and touching the tablet so lightly with the stylus that it is barely possible to see what you've begun to make, augment your tracings little by little'.<sup>43</sup> As described by Cennino, the drawings made with the stylus are tentative and evolving. They have no permanent bond with their material support and may eventually either be erased with bread crumbs or fixed (*fermate*) with ink and/or watercolor. According to Cennino, furthermore, it is only after practicing for a year with the stylus – on boxwood tablets, prepared pieces of vellum (*carta pecorina*), or cotton paper (*carta bambagina*) – that the apprentice is ready to advance to the next stage, which still consists of practice-drawing, but now with a quill pen. Completing his description of the painter's initiation, Cennino exclaims: 'Do you know what will happen to you in the practice of drawing with a pen? It will make you expert and practiced, capable of much drawing (*disegno*) within your head'.<sup>44</sup>

For painters in the tradition that Cennino records, the stylus was the instrument associated with the initial stages in the development

<sup>42</sup> Saenger P., "Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society", *Viator* 14 (1982) 382–383.

<sup>43</sup> Cennini, Cennino, *Il libro dell'arte*, ed. F. Brunello (Vicenza: 1982) chap. 8: 'Poi con esempio comincia a ritrarre cose agevoli quanto più si può, per usar la mano, e collo stile su per la tavoletta leggermente, che appena possi vedere quello che prima incominci a fare, crescendo i tuo' tratti a poco a poco'. My translation here and below.

<sup>44</sup> Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte*, chap. 13: 'Sai che t'avverrà, praticando il disegnare di penna? che ti farà sperto, practico e capace di molto disegno entro la testa tua'.



of the faculty of design, or the formation of the individual *ingenium*. Finally, and importantly for the question at hand, the stylus was the instrument associated by the twelfth-century Chartrian cleric Alain de Lille with the inscription of Nature's book: 'With the aid of a stylus, the maiden called up various images by drawing on clay tablets. The picture, however, did not cling closely to its underlying material but, quickly fading and disappearing, left no trace of the impression behind. Although the maiden, by repeatedly calling them up, gave them a continuity of existence, yet the images in her projected picture failed to endure'.<sup>45</sup> Alain thus portrays Lady Nature as a maker of pictures, aligning the instruments and creative acts of painters with the procreative acts of Nature. In situating the stylus – belonging to the poet but in the painter's hand – between the *alto concetto* (lofty idea) and Simone's image of Laura, Petrarch identified the still-fluid, but substantial and corporeal point of intersection of the individual artistic *ingenii* within the creative source that is so splendidly evoked in Alain's imagery.

Where the underlying question of value is concerned, Vasari's life of Simone Martini – a painter about whom the author 'knew' very little in a discursive sense – is a surprisingly useful guide. At the beginning of the life of the painter whom he mistakenly names 'Simone Memmi', in place of the more typical infancy narrative, Vasari offers up a eulogy:

One may certainly call happy those men who are inclined by nature to those arts that can bring them not only great honor and utility but also, what is more, fame and a name that will live on almost in perpetuity. Happier still are those who [...] carry in themselves from the cradle, gentility and civil customs, which make them most pleasing to all men. But happiest of all, finally (speaking of artisans), are those who [...] live at the time of some famous writer, who by means of a small portrait [*ritratto*] or other courteous gift of the art, happens, through his writings, to bring them eternal honor and renown. This last thing, among

<sup>45</sup> Alain de Lille, *De planctu Naturae*, in *Studi medievali*, ed. N.M. Häring, *Studi medievali* (1978) part 4 (or Prose 2), ll. 3–8: 'In latericiis vero tabulis arundinei stili ministerio virgo varias rerum picturaliter suscitabat imagines. Pictura tamen, subiacenti materiae familiariter non coherens, velociter evanescono moriens, nulla imaginum post se relinquebat vestigia. Quas cum saepe suscitando puella crebro vivere faciebat, tamen in scripturae proposito imagines perseverare non poterant'. Translation adapted from *The Complaint of Nature*, trans. J.J. Sheridan, *Mediaeval Sources in Translation* 26 (Toronto: 1980) 108.



those who concern themselves with *disegno*, is particularly to be desired and sought after by painters; since their works, being both superficially and in their ground [made] of color, cannot have the eternity granted to sculpture by objects of bronze or things of marble, or to architecture by buildings. It was thus a great fortune for Simone to have lived at the time of Petrarch and to have happened to find in Avignon, at the court, this most amorous poet, who desired to have an image of Lady Laura from the hand of master Simone. Whence, having that [image] according to his desire, he commemorated him in two sonnets.<sup>46</sup>

Vasari is here developing a well-worn conceit regarding the reputation of poets that Petrarch himself had adapted from a series of ancient authorities and transformed for his own purposes in the *Collatio laureationis*, the speech he delivered in 1341 on the occasion of his coronation as the 'new' poet laureate.

Speaking of the prizes due to poets, Petrarch observed: 'The same goes for the immortality of reputation: it too is double; the first is for themselves, the second for those who have been celebrated by such honor'.<sup>47</sup> The principal authority given for the second part of this claim is Vergil. Petrarch quotes the lines from the ninth book of the *Aeneid*, where the poet's voice intrudes into the narrative of the death of Nisus and Euryalus. In his intervention Vergil both presents an epitaph and indicates the relation of his songs (*carmine*) to perpetual memory:

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<sup>46</sup> Vasari, *Vite* 1:545–546: 'Felici veramente si possono dire quegli uomini che sono dalla natura inclinati a quell'arti che possono recar loro non pure onore e utile grandissimo, ma, che è più, fama e nome quasi perpetuo. Più felice poi sono coloro che si portano dalle fasce[...]gentilezza e costume cittadineschi, che gli rendono a tutti gli uomini gratissimi. Ma più felici di tutti, finalmente (parlando degli artefici), sono quelle che[...]vivono al tempo di qualche famoso scrittore, da cui per un piccolo ritratto o altra così fatta cortesia delle cose dell'arte si riporta premio alcuna volta, mediante gli loro scritti, d'eterno onore e nome. La qual cosa si deve, fra coloro che attendono alle cose del disegno, particolarmente desiderare e cercare dagli eccellente pittori; poichè l'opere loro, essendo in superficie e in campo di colore, non possono avere quell'eternità che danno i getti di bronzo e le cose di marmo alle sculture, o le fabbriche agli architetti. Fu dunque quella di Simone grandissima ventura, vivere al tempo di messer Francesco Petrarca, e abbattersi a trovare in Avignone alla corte questo amorosissimo poeta, desideroso di avere la immagine di Madonna Laura di mano di maestro Simone; perciocchè, avutala bella come desiderato avea, fece di lui memoria in due sonetti'.

<sup>47</sup> Petrarch, *Collatio laureationis*, in vol. 1 of *Opere latine di Francesco Petrarca*, ed. A. Bufano, 2 vols. (Turin: 1975) 10.3: 'Item nominis immortalitas; eaque duplex: prima in se ipsis, secunda in his, quos tali honore dignati sunt'.

Happy pair, if my songs have any power  
 no passage of days will extinguish time's memory of you  
 as long as the house of Aeneas shall dwell on the Capitol's immovable  
 rock  
 and the father of the Romans maintain his empire.<sup>48</sup>

In adapting to a memorial for Simone Martini the ancient idea that the songs of poets have the power to rescue the memory of a person from oblivion, Vasari supplies several keys to understanding the relationship that joined Petrarch and Simone through Laura. Most significantly, he recognized the memorial character of Petrarch's references to the Sienese painter. He also emphasized a relation of creative reciprocity between painter and poet, comparing the sonnets to a portrait (*ritratto*) given as a gift in exchange for the image of Laura, which Simone made according to his desire. While his account of this exchange is undoubtedly informed by his knowledge of the currency of gift-drawings as tokens of intimate relationships in his own time, Vasari's identification of a substantiating relation of reciprocity between friends as the necessary foundation of a durable memory speaks eloquently to the relationship – real and imagined – between Petrarch and Simone Martini.<sup>49</sup>

The one piece of evidence we have of creative collaboration between Petrarch and Simone has a distinctly memorial function. The work in question is the frontispiece that Simone made for Petrarch's treasured Vergil manuscript sometime around the year 1340 [Fig. 4]. Reversing a scenario that typically ascribes primary agency in the poetic conception of the frontispiece to Petrarch, we need also to imagine what this miniature might look like if the primary agency in its creation were ascribed instead to Simone.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Vergil, *Aeneid* 9.446–449, as cited in Petrarch, *Collatio laureationis*, 10.6: 'Fortunati ambo, si quid mea carmina possunt! / Nulla dies unquam memori vos eximet evo, / dum domus Enee Capitoli immobile saxum / accolet imperiumque pater romanus habebit'. My translation.

<sup>49</sup> See Nagel A., "Gifts for Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna", *Art Bulletin* 79 (1997) 647–668, and, more generally, Nagel A., "Art as gift: Liberal art and the Discourse of Religious Reform in the Renaissance", in Algazi, G., V. Groebner and B. Jussen (eds.), *Négocié le Don-Negotiating the Gift* (Göttingen: 2003) 387–413. See also, Cropper E., "Pontormo and Bronzino in Philadelphia: A Double Portrait", in Strehlke C.B. (ed.), *Pontormo, Bronzino, and the Medici: The Transformation of the Renaissance Portrait in Florence* (Philadelphia: 2004) 1–32.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Brink J., "Simone Martini, Francesco Petrarca and the Humanist Program of the Virgil Frontispiece", *Medievalia* 3 (1977) 83–109; Patterson A.M., *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Berkeley: 1987) 19–27. Patterson also provides



Fig. 4. Simone Martini, frontispiece for Petrarch's Vergil manuscript, (1338–1340). Tempera on vellum. Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana MS A.79 inf., fol. 1v. © Photo: Scala / Art Resource, New York

The frontispiece invites two intersecting modes of engagement, one of them iconographic and allegorical, and the other lyrical. If we look to the action of the figure identified in the inscriptions as the commentator Servius, we might follow the well-trodden path and interpret the action of pulling back the curtain to reveal the figure of Vergil as an invitation to follow Servius's example and turn the page, peel back the layers, or read allegorically. In this reading of the frontispiece, the evergreen laurel that shades the reclining poet becomes a marker of a pastoral space. But the encounter with the tree is not exhausted in such a reading. If we focus instead on the encounter, marked by the tree and the superimposed images of the veil and hand, the frontispiece offers itself up as a new sort of icon, a pictorial matrix for loving exchange, the perpetual portrayal of Laura as it would be realized in Petrarch's poetry.

In this last version of the frontispiece, the laurel takes its position as part of an extended notarial signature. It stands as the flourishing head of a genealogical tree, which, according to the underlying inscriptions, has its roots planted in Italian soil. As the inscriptions indicate, this is a genealogy of Italian, which is to say vernacular, poetry, a fact which has sometimes been obscured by the historical focus on Petrarch's status as a humanist and his dedication to all things 'classical'. The two inscriptions located within the painted field read respectively: 'Oh bountiful Italian soil you have nourished many great poets, / but this man allowed you to attain the aims of the Greeks' and 'Servius [is here] uncovering the secrets of the lofty Maro, / that they may be revealed to leaders, shepherds and farmers'.<sup>51</sup> In flagrant defiance of the ancient maxim 'verba volat, scripta manent' (words fly, writing remains), winged hands display the two *cartelli* on which the agency of the ancient poets and commentators is thus described.

Finally, the new poet's witnessing hand is both represented and made literally present in the inscription located in the margin below the illuminated field. In translation this last inscription reads: 'Mantua [made] Vergil who composed such verses, / Siena made Simone whose

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a succinct review of the fate of the frontispiece in the humanistically inclined accounts of twentieth-century scholarship.

<sup>51</sup> 'Ytala praeclaros tellus alis alma poetas / Sed tibi graecorum dedit hic attingere metas' and 'Servius altiloqui retegens archana maronis / ut pateant ducibus pastoribus atque colonis'.

hand painted such'.<sup>52</sup> This last inscription is, significantly, precisely what it appears to be, that is: words inscribed in ink on the vellum surface of the page. Collapsing both historical time and pictorial space, and thereby articulating the point at which the eyes of both painter and poet might, in Petrarch's terms, 'see their own mortality', this last inscription is exceptional for its literal presence.

This final inscription is also an epitaph – one that bears consideration in light of fourteenth-century debates on the relative efficacy of 'bronze' versus 'paper monuments'.<sup>53</sup> By means of the memorial distych Petrarch made Simone's frontispiece into a paper monument, a poetic remembrance inscribed in the pages of a book. He also made Simone's hand, and the vitality it conveyed through contingent, vernacular practices, complicit in its own commemoration.

The final inscription may well have been added to the margin of the illuminated page by Petrarch after Simone's death in 1344. Since all three inscriptions are rendered in the poet's careful handwriting, there is no way to ascertain on paleographic grounds alone that the lowermost inscription postdates the other two. Furthermore, whereas Pierre de Nolhac was able to read the marginal inscription at the beginning of the twentieth century, when he inaugurated the study of the Ambrosiana manuscript, it is now so badly abraded that it is practically illegible.<sup>54</sup> There is, however, other compelling evidence in support of such a hypothesis. The wording of the inscription is an obvious play on the famous distych on Vergil's tomb in Naples: 'Mantua bore me, Calabria stole me away, now Parthenope holds me; I sang of flocks, fields, generals'.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the frontispiece immediately follows the flyleaf on which Petrarch inscribed memorials to the friends and

<sup>52</sup> 'Mantua Virgilium qui talia carmina finxit; / Sena tulit Simonem digito qui talia pinxit'.

<sup>53</sup> See Usher J., "Monuments More Enduring than Bronze: Boccaccio and Paper Inscriptions", *Heliotropia* 4.1 (2007) 1–30, <http://www.heliotropia.org/04-0102/usher.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> Nolhac P. de, *Pétrarque e l'humanisme*, 2 vols., Bibliothèque littéraire de la Renaissance (Paris: 1907) 1:140–161. For a more recent description of the manuscript with a review of the relevant bibliography, see Lord M.L., "Petrarch and Vergil's First Eclogue: The Codex Ambrosianus", *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 86 (1982) 253–276. On Petrarch's handwriting in the Ambrosiana manuscript, see Petrucci A., *La scrittura di Francesco Petrarca*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana studi e testi (Vatican City: 1967) 39–51.

<sup>55</sup> 'Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere, tenet nunc Parthenope, cecini pascua, rura, duces'. See Trapp J.B., "The Grave of Vergil", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 42 (1984) 1–31.



relations who had been taken from him. This necrology includes not only a memorial for his son Giovanni, but also the long inscription written in 1348, commemorating the death of Laura.

While the frontispiece is surely not *the* portrait of Laura described in Petrarch's sonnets, it is undoubtedly *a* portrait of Laura: which is to say an iteration or earthly manifestation of the image that Petrarch claimed Simone must have conceived in heaven. It is the sort of portrait that the painter might imagine 'down here with us where the body serves as a veil for souls to wear'. In its address to the viewer, this portrait both represents and elicits an inter-subjective poetic interchange, wherein illumination and inscription stand in a reciprocal relation to each other and in a subservient and erotically charged relation to living nature – the book written, inside and out, by the hand of God. In the verses inscribed in the manuscript's lower margin, Petrarch effectively blurred the distinction between the results of Vergil's poetic activity and those of Simone's painting, leaving the reader to wonder whether Simone's hand (*digito*) painted pictures or composed songs, and thereby implying that it might have done both. Simone, never the mindless hand, offered up an exquisitely painted page, which, in both its forms and its highly selective coloration, treads the line between inscription and painting. He also, possibly unknowingly, set the stage for Petrarch's compliment in the figure of the reclining poet holding his pen aloft against a sky infused with the blue pigment of the illuminator's brush, the same pigment used to illuminate the three initials that run down the center of the page. As the painter composes, or songs, the poet paints the heavens and the page becomes a testament to the sort of world-building enterprise that the American poet Edward Hirsch recently described as the 'work of lyric'.

Returning to the emblem of the hand, the veil and the tree trunk, I would suggest that it presents the potential remedy, in intimate poetic relations, to the practice of making empty idols and thereby rending Italy's body. In portraying the moment at which Simone's new, vernacular *stile* became the subject, and the reflexive medium of Petrarch's idolizing perspective, the pictorial emblem also modeled Petrarch's desire for the substantiation of the gesture in inter-subjective, male relations, the healing of Italy's body, and the investment of the name with a subject. In the middle of the fourteenth century, no one knew better than Petrarch the cultural necessity of the vital charge conveyed by that changeable and corruptible medium, and no one registered its mortality more eloquently than he did in than in his epitaph for

Simone Martini. More than two centuries later, when Vasari reconstructed that 'paper monument' for his own present, he did so without recourse to knowledge of the objective qualities of Simone's art. What Vasari commemorated under Simone's name, and recognized as the necessary content of Tuscan style, was the volatile substance of an amorously motivated, historically contingent relationship.

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‘SALVE MARIA GODS MOEDER GHEPRESEN.’  
THE SALVE REGINA AND THE VERNACULAR IN THE  
ART OF HANS MEMLING, ANTHONIS DE ROOVERE,  
AND JACOB OBRECHT

Jessica E. Buskirk

The *Maarten van Nieuwenhove Diptych* [Fig. 1] by Hans Memling is a generous image.<sup>1</sup> Its two panels (each measuring 52 by 41.5 cm) give the viewer seemingly direct access to an encounter between Maarten, a young Bruges patrician, and the Virgin and Child. The figures meet in a world that is so full of richly painted stuffs – glowing stained-glass windows; sturdy, wood-paneled walls; and brilliantly colored cloth – that it appears to exceed its fictive boundaries and merge with the space of the viewer. The picture’s surfeit of visual information extends from the deep background, with the tiny figures crossing a bridge over Bruges’s Minnewater, which can be seen through the window in the right panel, to the extreme foreground, where the Virgin’s cloak emerges from the left panel onto the diptych’s golden frame [Fig. 2].<sup>2</sup> The red cloak, which is mirrored by a piece of identical red cloth propping up Maarten’s book in the portrait wing, provides a rubric for interpreting the image: Maarten’s Mary is the *mater misericordiae*, the mother of mercy. The *mater misericordiae* is the Virgin as the embodiment of compassion, celebrated by the words of the Salve Regina antiphon and depicted as the iconographic type called the *Schutzmantelmadonna*, who uses her cloak to shelter a group of diminutive people clustered

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<sup>2</sup> For this identification, see Vos D. de, *Hans Memling: The Complete Works* (Ghent: 1994) 297. The two towers of the Minnewater are also represented in the epitaph of Maarten’s sister-in-law. Martens M., “The Epitaph of Anna van Nieuwenhove”, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Journal* 27 (1992) 37.



Fig. 1. Hans Memling, *Maarten van Nieuwenhove Diptych* (1487). Bruges, Sint-Janshospitaal, Memling-museum. © Lukas – Art in Flanders VZW



Fig. 2. Hans Memling, *Maarten van Nieuwenhove Diptych* (1487). Bruges, Sint-Janshospitaal, Memlingmuseum. © Lukas – Art in Flanders VZW. Detail of cloak

around her.<sup>3</sup> In Memling's image, Mary's cloak figuratively crosses the borders of the panels to support his prayer book rather than cover his head, but the basic principle is the same. Through the device of her cloak, Mary shows benevolence to both the worshiper within, and the one in front of, the image. The diptych stages generosity in multiple ways: in the immediacy of its illusionistic effects and as spiritual comfort and edification. Following the example set by the Virgin who offers the gift of her red cloak to her devotees, Maarten's name saint St. Martin of Tours is depicted in the stained glass window behind him, cutting his own cloak (painted in the same red) to share with a beggar.<sup>4</sup>

The pictorial and thematic abundance of the diptych is especially striking when compared with its immediate precursor – the half-length devotional portrait diptych format developed by Rogier van der Weyden in the late 1450s [Fig. 3]. Rogier, for whom Memling worked until the master's death in 1464, may have based his own half-length images of the Virgin and Child on an Italo-Byzantine icon donated to the Cathedral of Cambrai [Fig. 4]; whether or not this is the case, his

<sup>3</sup> Duffy E., *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400–1580* (New Haven London: 2005) 264, for the ways in which this Marian type was celebrated. See Seibert J. "Schutzmantelschaft", in Kirschbaum E. et al. (eds.), *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie* Vol. 4 (Freiburg: 2004) 128–133, for the early medieval legal origins of the term. A child was legitimized and adopted when the father took him or her under his cloak. Also, women of high rank could protect fugitives by offering them refuge under their cloaks.

<sup>4</sup> Bauman G., "Early Flemish Portraits, 1425–1525", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* Spring 43:4 (1986) 53. Bauman points to the St. Martin representation as an emblem of charity. The piece of identically red cloth propping up Maarten's prayer book may also refer to the St. Martin legend – implying that Mary, like Martin, has cut her cloak into two. My thanks to Jan Dumolyn for the suggestion.



Fig. 3. Rogier van der Weyden, *Jean de Froimont Diptych* (*Virgin and Child*, ca. 1464, Caen, Musée des Beaux-Arts), (*Jean de Froimont*, ca. 1464, Brussels, Musées-Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique). © KIK-IRPA, Brussels





Fig. 4. Anonymous, *Madonna of Cambrai* (14th century).  
Cambrai, Notre Dame de Grâce Cathedral

paintings reproduce the icon's atmosphere of airless sanctity.<sup>5</sup> Posed against a monochromatic field, Rogier's figures sit at a remove from the world of the viewer and are linked to each other only by the gestures of the Christ Child and the delicately stenciled words that hang somewhere behind them. Memling takes the kernel of Rogier's diptych concept, the meeting between temporally and ontologically disparate

<sup>5</sup> Panofsky E., *Early Netherlandish Painting. Its Origins and Character* Vol. 1 (New York: 1971) 297. For important reappraisal of this link between early Netherlandish paintings and Byzantine icons, see Powell A., "A Point 'Ceaselessly Pushed Back': The Origin of Early Netherlandish Painting", *Art Bulletin* 88, 4 (2006) 707–728.

figures across the divide of panels, and amplifies it with illusionistic detail and a more explicit enactment of spiritual hope.

This article argues that Memling's elaboration of Rogier's format was not simply the result of one artist's ambition to surpass his master but part of a larger trend in the production and reception of works of religious art in late fifteenth-century Bruges. In the last half of the fifteenth century, the poet Anthonis de Roovere and the composer Jacob Obrecht – Memling's Bruges compatriots – also created works of art that intensified their audience's experience of Marian devotion and self-consciously developed the work of their predecessors by building a bridge from the sacred realm of Latin prayer to the here-and-now of the audience. I will compare Memling's image with compositions by De Roovere and Obrecht that also take the *mater misericordiae* and the *Salve Regina* as their theme. All three compositions share a common source in the Latin material, but the way everyday reality is expressed is media-specific. In the poetry of De Roovere, the here-and-now is invoked with vernacular language, and in the works of Memling and Obrecht, the immediate experience of the audience is evoked by the use of illusionism and references to popular music, respectively.

### *The Banality of Mimetic Depiction*

The *Van Nieuwenhove Diptych* has also been very generous to art historians; its wealth of detail offers a great deal of pictorial intricacy to interpret. In particular, the convex mirror in the left panel is an oft-revisited touchstone for discussions of the complexity of early Netherlandish painting [Fig. 5]. The prominently placed mirror is a *mise-en-abyme* that reflects and revises the scene in front of it, casting doubt on the possibility of unmediated access to the pictorial space and to Mary. In the mirror, Maarten is shown from the side, kneeling at the short end of the table at which the Virgin sits with an open prayer book beside her. This prayer book is excluded from the larger picture, as is the fact (revealed in the mirror) that the picture's frames are window frames. In the mirror, the viewer sees the reflection of the light, open landscape behind the two back-lit figures and realizes that this is where the image places him – in the landscape – peering into the Virgin's *cubiculum* from without. The picture initially asserts a contiguity of pictorial space and real space through the device of the extended cloak and the inclusion of the Minnewater as a landmark,





Fig. 5. *Maarten van Nieuwenhove Diptych* (1487). Bruges, Sint-Janshospitaal, Memlingmuseum. © Lukas – Art in Flanders VZW. Detail of mirror

and then disorients the viewer by revealing that the boundary that seemed porous is actually not so easily breached. The information provided by the mirror has led art historians to question the sincerity of the image's illusionism. Hans Belting writes, 'By this device [the reflection], the painter cancels out the picture's banality, warning us against taking the burgher milieu too literally. The aloofness of the old icon, which first seemed abolished, is restored on a symbolic plane'.<sup>6</sup>

According to Belting, the diptych's mimetic style and subject matter, along with its promise of intimacy with the Virgin, is a tease. Once the

<sup>6</sup> Belting H., *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago: 1994) 432–434.

evidence of the mirror has been absorbed, the viewer realizes his error: Mary belongs to the realm of the sacred, not the mundane. The picture uses the lure of illusionism to teach the viewer a lesson. In my view, Belting's interpretation of the diptych as the vehicle through which a message is delivered neglects the object's role in the daily devotion of its owner and primary viewer, Maarten van Nieuwenhove.<sup>7</sup> And it also poses the viewing experience as a one-way street, as though after the spatial implications of the mirror have been understood, there is no going back. In contrast, I think that Mary is as present as she is removed, and the imagery of the diptych creates a conceptual path between these poles that the viewer can travel multiple times in both directions. The strong pull of the picture's rhetoric of immediacy cannot be simply undone.

The inscription on the frame of the diptych tells us that Maarten was only twenty-three years old when it was made, and the high quality of the painting and the density of its imagery indicate that it was intended to have longevity, to serve as the focus of his individually practiced devotion for the rest of his life. Maarten would have knelt before the open diptych with a prayer book in front of him, in the very same posture that is represented in the portrait panel and then further reflected in the mirror. The image not only had to sustain Maarten's intellectual interest, it also had to support, and expand, a recurring ritual that largely consisted of prayers addressed to the Virgin Mary. The purpose of the diptych was not to communicate a particular message but to cultivate a certain experience of prayer.

### *Regina Misericordiae*

In the fifteenth century, the Christian ritual of prayer was scripted.<sup>8</sup> Prayers were not spontaneously generated in the mind of the user but

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<sup>7</sup> Several recent discussions of the diptych emphasize its 'representational' function – i.e., how it would have been received by people other than Maarten. I believe that the functions of the diptych can be divided into primary and secondary, its primary role being the focus of Maarten's private devotion. For further elaboration, see my dissertation, *Intimacy and Anticipation in the Devotional Portrait Diptych*, University of California, 2008; and Borchert T., *Memling and the Art of Portraiture*, trans. K. L. Belkin (London: 2005).

<sup>8</sup> As Paul Saenger points out, the ideal of unscripted, impromptu prayer is a modern, Protestant one. Saenger P., "Books of Hours and the Reading Habits of the Later

taken from the Bible, liturgy, or tradition, and the frequent repetition of certain prayers was deemed to be especially effective.<sup>9</sup> Prayer books like the one in the portrait of Maarten van Nieuwenhove contained personalized content, such as specialized prayers addressed to specific saints or composed for particular apotropaic purposes, but they were largely made up of standard material. Books of hours, for instance, which were abbreviated versions of the breviary intended for use by lay persons, included the psalms and antiphons that are the core of the Divine Office.<sup>10</sup> Most prayers, whether individually recited or celebrated in the liturgy, were formulaic, integrating one or more of four basic elements: confession, praise, petition, and thanksgiving.<sup>11</sup>

In a recent article, Reindert Falkenburg associates the imagery of Memling's diptych with the words of the antiphon *Salve Regina*.<sup>12</sup> Initially introduced as part of the liturgy in the eleventh century, the *Salve* became equally popular as a chant set to music and an individually recited prayer that appeared in books of hours.<sup>13</sup> In the fifteenth century, the *Salve* antiphon developed into its own paraliturgical ceremony, sung in the evening after Compline in churches all over Europe.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the *Salve* ranked just below the *Ave Maria*

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Middle Ages", in Chartier R. (ed.), *The Culture of Print. Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton, New Jersey: 1989) 143.

<sup>9</sup> The repetitive recitation of prayers was primarily intended to decrease the amount of time spent in purgatory by the praying person or by his or her loved one, but Thomas Lentes also provides examples of more disinterested motivations, like nuns praying to create 'garments' for Mary. For an analysis of both 'counting piety' and contemporary critiques of it, see Lentes T., "Counting Piety in the Late Middle Ages", in Hamburger J. – Bouché A.M. (eds.) *The Mind's Eye. Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: 2006).

<sup>10</sup> For the typical layout of a book of hours, see Wieck R., *Painted Prayers. The Book of Hours in Medieval and Renaissance Art* (New York: 1997) 157–167.

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed description of these types in fifteenth century Flemish prayer, see Oosterman J., *De Gratie van het Gebed. Overlevering en Functie van Middelnederlandse Berijmde Gebeden*, Vol. 1 (Amsterdam: 1995) 24–37.

<sup>12</sup> Falkenburg R., "Hans Memling's *Van Nieuwenhove Diptych*: The Place of Prayer in Early Netherlandish Devotional Painting", in Hand J.O. – Spronk R. (eds.), *Essays in Context: Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych* (Cambridge: 2006) 92–109.

<sup>13</sup> Morgan N., "Texts and Images of Marian Devotion in Fourteenth-Century England", in Rogers N. (ed.), *England in the Fourteenth Century. Proceedings of the 1991 Harlaxton Symposium* (Stamford: 1993) 43. Antiphons had been incorporated into the liturgy since the fourth century, but it was not until the thirteenth century that their use became increasingly important. See "Antiphon", in Knighton – Fallows (eds.), *The Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music* 378.

<sup>14</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* 264. Duffy describes it as a popular devotion in England, citing bequests made of torches, incense, and musical accompaniment.

and the Pater Noster as a prayer learned by heart and recited often by the laity.<sup>15</sup> Like the similarly themed Ave Maria, the Salve is primarily composed of two elements of prayer, petition and praise, addressed to the Virgin:

Salve Regina [Mater] misericordiae vita dulcedo et spes nostra salve. Ad te clamamus exules filii evae. Ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes in hac lacrymarum valle. Eia ergo advocate nostra illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte. Et Jhesum benedictum fructum ventris tui nobis post hoc exilium ostende. O clemes O pia O dulcis [Virgo] Maria.

Hail, Queen [Mother] of mercy, our life, sweetness, and hope, hail. To you we exiled children of Eve, we cry. To you we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, our advocate, your eyes of mercy to us. And show us, after this exile, Jesus, the blessed fruit of your womb. O gentle, loving, sweet [Virgin] Mary.

Falkenburg argues that the *Van Nieuwenhove Diptych* was inspired by the presentational aspect of the Salve's text, the request that Mary show Jesus, the fruit of her womb, to 'we exiled children of Eve'.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, this line resonates with the painting in two ways. Mary holds up an actual fruit, a sign of her role as the new Eve who stands beside Christ in the redemption of humanity, and she thrusts her son forward toward the viewer of the diptych as requested by the speaker(s) of the prayer. The shadow cast by Christ's pillow, just centimeters away from the Virgin's overflowing cloak, provides a visible token of her gesture.

The image stages the prayer's concept of Mary in other ways as well. Besides being an advocate who offers us the vision of her son, she is a queen set apart by the device of the windowsill, and she is the *mater misericordiae*, who extends her cloak to us.<sup>17</sup> The word *mater* was added to the text of the Salve in the sixteenth century, conflating the *mater misericordiae* epithet, first used by the monks at Cluny in the first half of the tenth century, with the words of the antiphon, which was probably written a century earlier at the monastery on

<sup>15</sup> Morgan, "Texts and Images of Marian Devotion" 43.

<sup>16</sup> Falkenburg, "Hans Memling's *Van Nieuwenhove Diptych*" 98.

<sup>17</sup> Falkenburg, "Hans Memling's *Van Nieuwenhove Diptych*" 103, notes the distancing effect of the windowsill, dividing the environs of Bruges from the sacred realm of the Virgin's *cubiculum*.

Reichenau.<sup>18</sup> Yet even before this interpolation, the prayer strongly evoked the two essential qualities of motherhood with its image of a woman both authoritative and nurturing, and emphasized the disparity of power between Mary and the worshiper who appeals to her with sighs and weeping. The prayer's first words, 'Salve Regina misericordiae' ('Hail, Queen of mercy'), provides a stark statement of the relationship that is visualized in the relative scale of the figures in the *Schutzmantelmadonna*: the Virgin is a supernaturally large figure that shelters her followers under a mantle of compassion. She is at once regally awesome and lovingly attentive. The *Van Nieuwenhove Diptych* forgoes the explicit imagery of the *Schutzmantel* and represents this dialectic of immediacy and distance in a more complex fashion.<sup>19</sup> Memling depicts the Virgin and the image of Maarten on the same scale and in close physical proximity, as indicated by the extension of the cloak into the portrait panel. But whereas the painted likeness of Maarten approaches the hem of the divine, the real Maarten, the image's primary viewer, is at once offered the cloak and made aware of his exclusion from its space by the mirror's depiction of the picture frames as window frames. Unfolding the theme of the Salve, the image mines the richness of the tension between distance and accessibility; Mary's ontological elevation is confirmed while her generosity is celebrated. Within this unresolved dialectic, intimacy and elevation can exist simultaneously, giving Maarten emotional space and time to explore feelings of awe and gratitude.

### *Private Devotion and the Fiction of Intimacy*

Praise of Mary as both awe-inspiring and kind is the underlying content of the image and the explicit theme of the prayer, but just as the

<sup>18</sup> Gros G., "Ave, Vierge Marie." *Étude sur les prières mariales en vers Français (XII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> Siècles)* (Lyon: 2004) 152.

<sup>19</sup> Two years later, Memling played with the iconography of the *mater misericordiae* on the ends of his *Ursula Shrine*. On one end, a large Virgin in a voluminous, red cloak holds the Christ Child, and together they show a fruit to the viewer. The two are worshipped by a pair of small, kneeling nuns, representing the religious community at the St. John's Hospital in Bruges, which commissioned the image. On the other end, a large St. Ursula is depicted in the form of the *Schutzmantelmadonna*, sheltering a group of her virgins under a large cloak. See Vos, *Hans Memling: The Complete Works* 296–303.

repeated recitation of the *Salve Regina* had a purpose beyond simply communicating that message, the ritual of viewing the diptych had a function beyond merely seeing it. In the fifteenth century, there were two contrasting rationales and models for the performance of private devotion. It was believed that the Virgin was responsive to the frequent recitation of prayers like the *Salve* and the *Ave Maria*, i.e., that the specific formulation of praise and entreaty in these prayers, if repeated often enough, might persuade Mary to intervene in God's judgment of the worshiper.<sup>20</sup> Yet, it had been long recognized that since God already knows everything in the human heart, the ritual of prayer was not for his benefit – or, by extension, for Mary's. Instead, the recitation of prayer primarily affected the person praying, moving the speaker to a higher state of devotion.<sup>21</sup> These two understandings of prayer, as the message delivered to the Virgin and as the method of cultivating spiritual experience, are very different but not mutually exclusive, and a man like Maarten van Nieuwenhove was probably capable of pursuing them both simultaneously in his devotional practice. Indeed, the two models could even be mutually dependent; just as the Virgin might better receive a prayer said with genuine feeling, so might endless repetition endow each word of a prayer with meditative richness.

In their respective research on devotional praxis in monastic circles, Mary Carruthers and Niklaus Largier have demonstrated that professional practitioners of prayer expended considerable effort to avoid symptoms of devotional exhaustion like wandering attention and 'aridity', the absence of emotional engagement.<sup>22</sup> In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as the pious laity began to emulate monastic practices, they too became subject to the problems of boredom and lack

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<sup>20</sup> See Lentjes, "Counting Piety" 55–57, for examples of visions of Mary and Christ, who appear to the praying person to confirm the efficacy of certain prayer practices.

<sup>21</sup> On the importance of intention and cultivating the proper state of devotion, see Saenger, "Books of Hours and the Reading Habits" 143; Lentjes, "Counting Piety" 68–78.

<sup>22</sup> Carruthers M., *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (New York: 1998); Largier N., "Inner Senses-Outter Senses. The Practice of Emotions in Medieval Mysticism," in Jaeger C.S., – Kasten I. (eds.), *Codierungen von Emotionen im Mittelalter/Emotions and Sensibilities in the Middle Ages* (Berlin: 2003) 3–15; as well as Largier N., *Die Kunst des Begehrens. Dekadenz, Sinnlichkeit und Askese* (Munich: 2007).



of affect in the performance of repetitive devotion.<sup>23</sup> Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century *Andachtsbilder* (devotional images), whether as small sculptures in female monasteries or later as paintings for the laity, addressed the problems of devotional exhaustion by presenting the viewer with an isolated, highlighted image on which to focus in his or her meditation.<sup>24</sup> What is striking, however, is that unlike earlier German or Italian traditions of the *Andachtsbild*, which are dominated by emotionally charged scenes of the Pieta or Christ as Man of Sorrows, the majority of small, devotional early Netherlandish paintings are tender, but not obviously heartrending, images of the Madonna and Child.<sup>25</sup> Rather than grabbing and holding the viewer's attention with a gruesome depiction of the Passion or the dead Christ, which calls upon his or her empathy with emotional and physical pain, these small Netherlandish paintings allow access to the serene world of mother and child. The pictures appeal to the viewer with a fiction of intimacy that is made possible by the visual idiom of the image. A comparison of a half-length Virgin and Child by Rogier [Fig. 3] with its alleged Italo-Byzantine prototype [Fig. 4] demonstrates a vast difference in the level of illusionism and a corresponding increase in psychological naturalism. The hard schematicism of the older icon is translated into a rounded, pliable representation of Mary as a girlish mother cradling her baby. Memling's *Van Nieuwenhove Diptych* intensifies this rhetoric of intimacy by providing evidence of spatial immediacy in addition to emotional proximity.

<sup>23</sup> For the devotional regime of a lay person, see Duffy E., *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers 1240–1570* (New Haven: 2006) 5–7. See also Morgan, "Texts and Images in Marian Devotion" 38–39.

<sup>24</sup> The classic art historical article on the *Andachtsbild* is Panofsky E., "Imago Pietatis: ein Beitrag zur Typengeschichte des 'Schmerzensmanns' und der 'Maria Mediatrice'", in *Festschrift für Max Friedländer zum 60. Geburtstag* (Leipzig: E.A. Seemann, 1927) 261–308. For the development of the art historical concept, see Schade K., *Andachtsbild: Die Geschichte eines kunsthistorischen Begriffs* (Weimar: 1996).

<sup>25</sup> An image of the nativity could also contain references to the Passion. See Goffen R., "Icon and Vision: Giovanni Bellini's Half-Length Madonnas", *Art Bulletin* 57 (1975) 487–518; Acres A., "The Columba Altarpiece and the Time of the World", *Art Bulletin* 80, 3 (2000) 422–451. The question of the emotionally effective *Andachtsbild* in early Netherlandish painting was the subject of a debate between James Marrow and Craig Harbison in *Simolus* in 1986. See Marrow J., "Symbol and Meaning in the Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages", *Simolus* 16, 2/3 (1986) 150–169; and in that same issue, Harbison C., "Response to James Marrow", 170–172.

*The Poetic Prayers of Anthonis de Roovere*

The poet Anthonis de Roovere addressed the immediate experience of his audience by glossing, paraphrasing, and rephrasing essential texts of Marian devotion in the West Flemish variant of Middle Dutch that was spoken in fifteenth-century Bruges. De Roovere is best known for having been granted a pension by the aldermen of Bruges from 1466 until his death in 1482.<sup>26</sup> He was a very active public figure, involved in the organization of festivities like the wedding of Charles the Bold, in addition to writing plays, *refreins*, and elegies for public performance.<sup>27</sup> He was associated with many of the city's most important social institutions, including the confraternities of Our Lady of Snow and Our Lady of the Dry Tree as well as being an active member of Bruges's oldest chamber of rhetoric, the Holy Ghost.<sup>28</sup> Within his lifetime, De Roovere saw his work both publicly performed and displayed, including his *Ode to the Holy Sacrament*, which was posted in churches to promote devotion to the Eucharist.<sup>29</sup>

Yet many of De Roovere's poems were apparently written for a more intimate venue. There are Marian poems known only from the 1562 publication *Rethoricale Wercken van Anthonis de Roovere* that seem to have been meant for a select group of readers and listeners. In his introduction to the *Rethoricale Wercken*, the sixteenth-century rhetorician Eduard De Dene claims that he copied De Roovere's poems out of the author's own manuscripts and the 'hantboeck' of a Bruges patrician, meaning a kind of diary or notebook.<sup>30</sup> The necessity of this

<sup>26</sup> The best source for De Roovere's biography is Oosterman J., "Anthonis de Roovere. Het Werk: Overlevering, Toeschrijving en Plaatsbepaling", *Jaarboek De Fonteyne* 45–46 (1995–1996) 37–38.

<sup>27</sup> For an assessment of De Roovere as a public figure and a convincing new argument for the audience and function of his elegy for Charles the Bold, see Mareel S., "For Prince and Townsman: An Elegy by Anthonis De Roovere on the Death of Charles the Bold", *Mediaevalia* 27, 2 (2006) 59–74.

<sup>28</sup> Many of De Roovere's pageantry activities were organized together with Our Lady of the Dry Tree members. Strohm R., *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* (Oxford: 2003) 83, 48.

<sup>29</sup> Oosterman J., "Brugge, Bid God om Vrede. Vroomsheidsoffensief van Vijftiende-Eeuwse Rederijkers", in Ramakers B. (ed.), *Conformisten en rebellen: Rederijkerscultuur in de Nederlanden (1400–1650)* (Amsterdam: 2003) 150–152.

<sup>30</sup> 'Soe heb ick uut liefden [...] my gheschickt by langher handt te vergaderen ende by een te copulerene eenighe particuliere stucken bijden voorgenoemden Anthonis de Roovere (die een vlaemsch Poete was) ghemaect zijnde. So in partie uut zijn eygene oude hantschriften ghecopieert, als ooc uut sekere hantboeck wijlent ghescreven by



type of transmission, from the manuscript of one author to another and from the diary of one acquaintance to another, underlines the limited circulation of these works, and their sophisticated form indicates that they were aimed at an educated audience.<sup>31</sup> Many of De Roovere's Marian poems have elaborate structures designed around the use of acrostics, alliteration, and alphabetical schemes; they are clever puzzles, meant to be read as much as spoken.

In addition to very formalist Marian compositions, De Roovere composed rhyming poems inspired by the Litany of the Virgin, and paraphrases of the Ave Maria and the Salve Regina. The paraphrases also incorporate some sophisticated poetic techniques (like spelling out the words of the Ave Maria using capital letters embedded in the text of the poem), yet they were also functional as prayers themselves. The 1562 publication presents De Roovere's Marian compositions as poetry without any rubrics (the set of instructions printed in red that prefaces prayer), but a text like *Salve Regina*, which follows the original very closely, could be recited alongside, or instead of, the Latin version.<sup>32</sup>

The tradition of paraphrasing and translating the Salve Regina and the Ave Maria in/to the vernacular was well established by the time De Roovere wrote his texts.<sup>33</sup> By the thirteenth century, vernacular versions of both proliferated throughout Europe. It is not difficult to guess why. As two oft-repeated individual prayers and, in the case of the Salve, a liturgical antiphon often set to music, they had a pervasive presence in the lives of lay Christians. They were woven into the fabric

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eenen notabelen poorter der voors. Stede van Brugghe dye metten selven Roovere seer familiaer was ende dickwils frequenterende by dyen vele van zijne wercken om uitschrijven van hem gheleent creech'. As quoted in Oosterman J., "'Tussen twee wateren zwem ik.' Anthonis de Roovere Tussen Rederijkers en Rhétoriqueurs", *Jaarboek De Fonteyne* 49–50 (1999–2000) 13.

<sup>31</sup> For a comparable discussion of the audience for vernacular prayers in Bruges, see Oosterman J., "A Prayer of One's Own: Rhymed Prayers and their Authors in Bruges in the First Half of the Fifteenth Century", in Smeyers M. – Cardon B. (eds.) *Flanders in a European Perspective: Manuscript Illumination around 1400 in Flanders and Abroad* (Leuven: 1995) 731–744.

<sup>32</sup> This text appears in the *Rehtoricale Wercken* and will henceforth be referred to as RWB2v°.

<sup>33</sup> See Gros, "Ave, Vierge Marie" 10, 151, on French versions of the Ave Maria and Salve Regina.. Geert Groote translated the Salve as part of his Middle Dutch book of hours. For more on this translation, see Dijk R. van, "Het Getijdenboek van Geert Grote. Terugblik en Vooruitzicht", *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 64 (1990) 156–193.

of daily life and for that reason they inspired proprietary feelings in the people who habitually recited them.

Moreover, they both celebrate the most beloved of intercessors in terms comparable to the conventions of vernacular, courtly poetry.<sup>34</sup> A French version of the *Salve Regina* from the first half of the fifteenth century begins 'Salve, pucelle precieuse / Vierge plaisant et deliteuse / Dame de toute grace plaine,' (Hail, precious maid/Kind and pleasant virgin/Lady, full of every grace), emphasizing aspects of ideal femininity like virginity and nobility.<sup>35</sup> An early fifteenth-century *Salve Regina* paraphrase in Middle Dutch by the Bruges poet Jan van Hulst praises Mary's beauty and purity using floral metaphors: 'Sonder smette zaliche roze / Acoleye preciose / Lelie vul der zuuerheit' (Holy rose without stain / Precious columbine / Lily full of purity).<sup>36</sup> Written in the language spoken by the worshiper in his everyday life and conforming to the tropes of courtly love and fealty so popular in contemporary poetry and romance, vernacular paraphrases and translations set their adoration of and gratitude toward the Virgin in earthly terms.

In comparison to the worldliness of these texts and the more or less direct translation of De Roovere's *Salve Regina* (RWB2v<sup>o</sup>), his *Lof van Maria* (RWB3r<sup>o</sup>) performs a more complicated task of bridging the gap between the realms of sacred and profane. Each line begins with a Latin word of the prayer (this is the first of four stanzas):

SALVE Maria Gods moeder ghepresen  
 REGINA des hemels/dit is blijckelijck  
 MISERICORDIE des zondaers wtgelesen  
 UITA waer in niemant is v ghelijckelijck  
 DULCEDO zijt ghy niemande beswijckelijck  
 ET SPES naer mijn simpel vermonden  
 NOSTRA /dies roepen hoe arm hoe rijckelijck  
 SALVE/die *ons* vanden *helscen* bant hebt ontbonden  
 AD TE/die gheladen zijt met sware sonden  
 CLAMAMUS om te *verweruene* des hemels *pant*<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Falkenburg R., *Fruit of Devotion. Mysticism and the Imagery of Love in Flemish Paintings of the Virgin and Child 1450–1550* (Amsterdam: 1994). For the use of love language from the Song of Songs in late medieval prayer, see esp. 65–76.

<sup>35</sup> Gros, "Ave, Vierge Marie" 162–168.

<sup>36</sup> Oosterman, *De Gratie van Het Gebed* vol. 2, 315.

<sup>37</sup> The word 'pant' in Middle Dutch has an economic connotation and could also be translated as something like collateral. The concept (*pignus*) in the Vulgate is also primarily economic; in passages in Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy, it is mentioned in the rules governing usury. Apropos of the *Mater Misericordiae* imagery of

EXULES zijn wy van deewich iolijt beuonden  
 FILI EVE/dies wy roepen tallen stonden  
 Maria beschermt ons vanden helschen brandt.<sup>38</sup>  
 SALVE Maria, praiseworthy mother of God  
 REGINA of heaven as is clear  
 MISERICORDIE exquisite, for sinners  
 VITA in which no one is equal to you  
 DULCEDO in which you are disloyal to no one  
 ET SPES (as is stated by my simple words)  
 NOSTRA / the poor and the rich alike exclaim,  
 SALVE / you who freed us from the bonds of hell  
 AD TE / who has taken heavy sins upon yourself,  
 CLAMAMUS in order to receive heaven's pledge  
 EXULES from eternal joy we are judged  
 FILI EVE / This we exclaim every hour  
 Maria, protect us from the fires of hell.<sup>39</sup>

Seen on the page or said aloud, the words of the Latin prayer announce themselves, dragging along reminders of the singing of the Salve or the recitation of it in the Hours of the Virgin. They interrupt the lyrical flow of the Middle Dutch, punctuating the reader's immediate comprehension of the vernacular with words that, although very familiar to the average worshiper, delay understanding for a crucial instant.<sup>40</sup> The multilevel structure has two consequences. First, it isolates and highlights the words of the Latin prayer, whose resonance may have dissipated through rote repetition. Words like *VITA* and *DULCEDO* are removed from their original context and presented in isolation for contemplation. Second, it draws out the experience of the prayer by unfolding and glossing the meaning of each word. *VITA* and *DULCEDO* are cut loose from *NOSTRA* and given their own independent meanings. Rather than addressing Mary as 'our life, sweetness and hope,' it is her incomparable life and merciful sweetness that are

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the Salve, the pledge most often mentioned is a cloak or a garment, and in Ezechiel (18:12), the idea of keeping a pledge is equated with the lack of charity. Apropos of the Chamber of the Holy Ghost (De Roovere's chamber of rhetoric), in his second letter to the Corinthians (1:22 and 5:5) and his letter to the Ephesians (1:14), Paul says that the Holy Spirit is God's pledge on salvation. Many thanks to Jan Dumolyn for this suggestion.

<sup>38</sup> As reproduced in Mak J.J., *De Gedichten van Anthonis de Roovere. Naar Alle tot Dusver Bekende Handschriften en Oude Drukken* (Zwolle: 1955) 151.

<sup>39</sup> With much help on the translation from Samuel Mareel and Jan Dumolyn.

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of reading in Latin vs. the vernacular, see Saenger, "Books of Hours and the Reading Habits" 148.

praised. A full translation of the stanza demonstrates how the poem amplifies the prayer's theme of praise:

HAIL Mary, praiseworthy mother of God  
 QUEEN of Heaven, as is clear,  
 (Of) exquisite MERCY for sinners  
 In your LIFE, no one is equal to you  
 In your SWEETNESS, you are disloyal to no one  
 AND HOPE (as is stated by my simple words)  
 Of OURS, the poor and the rich alike exclaim,  
 HAIL, you who freed us from the bonds of hell  
 TO YOU, who has taken heavy sins upon yourself,  
 WE CRY in order to receive heaven's pledge  
 EXILES from eternal joy we are judged,  
 We CHILDREN OF EVE. This we exclaim every hour:  
 Mary, protect us from the fires of hell.

The first stanza of De Roovere's text only addresses the first two lines of the Salve (Hail, Queen of mercy, our life, sweetness, and hope, hail. To you we exiled children of Eve, we cry), but even within those boundaries, it returns repeatedly to the theme of Mary's generosity. She is disloyal to no one; she frees us from the bonds of hell; she takes our sins upon her. This praise derives from the quintessential quality of the Virgin as intercessor – her compassion with humanity. As a message to Mary or the reader, the idea does not need repeating; the Virgin's status as intercessor was neither remarkable nor controversial. Instead, De Roovere's emphasis is aimed at extending the reader's experience. He pulls apart the words of the Latin prayer and embroiders them with Middle Dutch commentary not in order to develop the meaning of the prayer, which is conventionally fixed, but to protract the devotional ritual and further cultivate the feelings of gratitude that are embedded in the original.

### *Jacob Obrecht's Polyphonic Serenades*

Jacob Obrecht's Salve Regina motets extend the devotional experience in a comparable manner to the interpretations of the subject by Memling and De Roovere.<sup>41</sup> Obrecht was the succentor of the collegiate

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<sup>41</sup> A motet (as the term is used for fifteenth-century music) is basically any work with a Latin text other than hymns and the cyclical Mass Ordinary (wherein the

church of St. Donatian's in Bruges from 1485 until 1491 and again from 1498 through 1504.<sup>42</sup> As such, his official duties included the musical education and care of the boys being trained as singers in addition to the supervision of the adult singers in the choir.<sup>43</sup> Producing new pieces of music was not among his official duties, but Obrecht's obvious talent for composing was much in demand at St. Donatian's. It is likely that during his tenure in Bruges, he wrote at least thirteen polyphonic Mass settings, an impressive number when compared to his predecessor Aliamus de Groote, who seems to have only composed one new piece of music during his time as succentor.<sup>44</sup> Besides Mass settings, Obrecht composed polyphonic motets and numerous secular songs with complicated contrapuntal structures that may have been intended for the city minstrels in their regular market square concerts,<sup>45</sup> as well as Middle Dutch songs based on monophonic tunes that may have been written for the morality plays staged by St. Donatian's.<sup>46</sup>

Among Obrecht's official obligations as succentor was the direction of the daily Salve service. Beginning in 1480, the Salve was celebrated with polyphonic music in the nave of St. Donatian's every evening after Compline.<sup>47</sup> The purpose of the Salve service was first and foremost the

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chant for the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei are composed around the same *cantus firmus*). "Motet", in Knighton – Fallows (eds.), *The Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music* 401. It is a very difficult term to define, however, because of the popularity, flexibility, and longevity of the form. For a discussion of these issues, see Haar J., "Conference Introductory Remarks", in Pesce D. (ed.) *Hearing the Motet. Essays on the Motet in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (New York: 1997) 12–16.

<sup>42</sup> For a complete biography and stylistic analysis of the masses attributed to Obrecht, see Wegman R., *Born for the Muses: the Life and Masses of Jacob Obrecht* (Oxford: 1994).

<sup>43</sup> Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* 13.

<sup>44</sup> Wegman, *Born for the Muses* 162. The dating of Obrecht's work is not definite. Records for copying payments from St. Donatian's fabric accounts shows that prior to Obrecht's arrival in 1485, the last piece of music described as "new" was copied in 1476/7. In contrast, between 1485/86 and 1491/92, eight of the twenty-two masses copied are described as "new." Although Wegman (note, 161) speculates that it is possible that Obrecht's predecessors and successors may have written more music that was less highly valued and thus not transmitted in German and Italian sources, he believes it was equally likely they simply did not write as much music. All of the polyphonic choir books of St. Donatian's were destroyed in the sixteenth century. Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* 29.

<sup>45</sup> Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* 144.

<sup>46</sup> Wegman, *Born for the Muses* 156. The morality plays were a tradition initiated and continued by Aliamus de Groote.

<sup>47</sup> Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* 8.

celebration of the Virgin Mary. The service, which was attended by the public at large, involved the lighting of candles, ringing of bells, organ playing, and singing.<sup>48</sup> The choir might gather around a statue or a painting of the Virgin, in imitation of the angelic host singing the praises of the Virgin.<sup>49</sup> The music sung at St. Donatian's Salve was funded by the city and therefore also a matter of civic pride. When Obrecht suffered from an extended illness around the turn of the century and the Salve performances became disorganized, the city account of 1499/1500 states: 'it would be better – for the honour of the church and of the city (since the Salve is commonly attended by all noblemen and foreigners who are staying in the city) – not to sing the Salve rather than to sing it'.<sup>50</sup> The quality of music, in performance and in conception, was crucial – serving simultaneously as heartfelt praise of the Virgin and as a celebration of Bruges's praise of her.

In 1483, the Bruges minstrels, who were paid by the city to play serenades on the market square, began to perform their own Salve concerts in St. Donatian's on free-market days following the choir's Salve concert. The minstrels performed polyphonic songs arranged for their instruments on these occasions, and it is likely that there was a self-conscious juxtaposition between compositions written for the vocal and instrumental performance of the Salve.<sup>51</sup> Reinhard Strohm speculates that although many of the minstrels' instrumental pieces were based on well-known plainsong (like the Salve Regina chant itself), secular tunes may have also been used in certain compositions, like the Salve Reginas set to secular tunes that are preserved in a sixteenth-century Netherlandish choir book.<sup>52</sup> Obrecht and De Groote may have written arrangements for the minstrels' performances in addition to incorporating secular music into their vocal works for the Salve.<sup>53</sup> 'This', writes Strohm, 'was "audience-directed" music; people had to be able to recognise the underlying tune or plainsong'.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Wegman, *Born for the Muses* 305.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>51</sup> Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* 86.

<sup>52</sup> The codex Mus. MS 34 of the Bavarian State Library, Munich. Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* 144 n. 159.

<sup>53</sup> Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* 144, cites the motets written by the successor of St. Savior's, Nicasius de Brauwere, for the Salve concerts of the minstrels.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 144–145.

Medieval polyphonic music stems from a principle of elaboration. The most basic liturgical music is plainsong, a set of monophonic tunes passed down from early Christian liturgy. Each part of the Mass – from the five main texts of the Mass Ordinary (the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei) to the antiphons – is associated with its own melody.<sup>55</sup> What began as simple counterpoint to this basic plainsong developed into polyphony, the practice of interweaving several voices around the chant, which serves as the motif or the *cantus firmus* (fixed song) of the composition.<sup>56</sup> By the fifteenth century, the principle of elaboration had extended beyond the use of the plainsong as the *cantus firmus*; as already mentioned in connection with the Salve service at St. Donatian's, sacred music was written using secular melodies as inspiration. There were several methods of bringing the sacred and secular together. For instance, some cyclical Masses Ordinary quoted secular chansons as their *cantus firmi*,<sup>57</sup> and certain sacred motets might modify or 'paraphrase' a plainchant in order to sound more like a troubadour ballade.<sup>58</sup>

The initial moments of Obrecht's Salve Regina motet for three voices (tenor, superius, and bass),<sup>59</sup> which Strohm dates to Obrecht's Bruges period, makes its origins in plainsong very clear. The antiphon begins with a single tenor singing an extended 'Salve'. A second tenor joins the first for the next words: 'Regina Misericordiae'. Intoned in unison with an oscillating melody, the words are drawn out into a long cascade of syllables. This singing of 'Salve Regina Misericordiae' establishes the identity of the antiphon and confirms its sacred roots in the monophonic chant of the early Christian liturgy. The tenor voice is then joined by the superius for 'vita', followed at the end of the word by the introduction of the bass. As the antiphon progresses, the voices fall out of synch with each other and articulate the text at different

<sup>55</sup> The music for later additions to the Divine Office like the Salve Regina was composed according to a system of modes derived from the early plainsong.

<sup>56</sup> The *cantus firmus* is usually sung by the tenor in late medieval and Renaissance music. See Bergeron K., "Chant or the Politics of Inscription," as well as "Chant" and "Tenor", both in the glossary of Knighton, – Fallows (eds.), *The Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music* 384, 412.

<sup>57</sup> The most famous examples of the use of a secular *cantus firmus* are *L'Homme Armé* masses based on a song written for Charles the Bold. Taruskin R., *The Oxford History of Western Music* Vol. 1 (Oxford: 2004) 485.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 501. Taruskin writes about the mediating form of the Salve Regina motet composed by Philippe Basiron.

<sup>59</sup> Wolf J., *Werken van Jacob Obrecht* 7 vols. (Amsterdam: 1968) No. 16.



tempos, staggered like the voices of a canon. The shape of the text is lost in the interweaving, melismatic undulation of the three voices, which extends each word beyond recognizable meaning. Finally, the voices intersect for the second 'Salve' of the antiphon, singing it in resonant unison and then sinking into silence. 'Ad te clamamus' chants a single tenor, returning to the severe monophonic melody of the plain-song. So continues the motet, building and swelling, then pausing and restarting the antiphon's somber *cantus firmus*, until the final three drawn-out words are sung in isolation: 'O, dulcis Maria'. As the motet unfolds, the convergence of its voices evokes different emotional states (wistful, joyful, yearning) but returns repeatedly to the *cantus firmus* to be grounded in its solemnity.

Despite its ethereal sound, the world of the everyday is woven into the motet's alternation of unadorned, ancient chant and rhapsodic counterpoint. Strohm believes this Salve Regina was written for performance in Bruges's Salve concerts because it resembles the arrangement of the minstrels' instrumental songs.<sup>60</sup> Obrecht's vocal compositions would have been in aesthetic dialogue with instrumental polyphony. The attentive listener could have not only detected elements of the music performed by the secular musicians inside the church, but might have also heard echoes of the market square outside.

### *Analogy and Audience*

Obrecht, like Memling and De Roovere, begins with the sacred text, and – in his case – a sacred melody, and builds outward, giving the Latin words new life with formal and thematic elaboration.<sup>61</sup> All three artists mine the richness of the antiphon's premise: the worshiper's apprehension of the Virgin's awesome power and his or her desire for Mary's tender mercy. The *regina misericordiae* is the archetypal

<sup>60</sup> Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* 145.

<sup>61</sup> M. Jennifer Bloxam develops the idea of Obrecht as an exegetical composer; Bloxam proposes that Obrecht's works are analogous to the contemporary thematic sermon, quoting authoritative "texts" (the *cantus firmus*) that are glossed by his composition of additional vocal lines. Her argument goes even further, however, finding a parallel between the structure of Obrecht's *Factor obis* motet and contemporary homiletic models. Bloxam M.J., "Obrecht as Exegete. Reading *Factor obis* as a Christian Sermon", in Pesce (ed.), *Hearing the Motet. Essays on the Motet of the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (New York: 1997) 169–192.



mother whose sweetness and authority are heightened by the drama of salvation. Obrecht, Memling, and De Roovere develop their audience's awareness of this theme by juxtaposing the immediate with the remote, the malleable with the unyielding. Memling explores the idea with illusionism that pushes forward, claiming to abolish the boundary of the picture plane, and a mirrored *mise-en-abyme* that pulls back, inducing a moment of reflection on the picture's process of reflection. De Roovere uses the Latin prayer as the skeleton of his poem, the rigid bones that hold the elegiac flow of the Middle Dutch in place. The Salve Regina motet by Obrecht remains grounded in the solemnity of the recurring plainchant between intervals of its three voices climbing and falling in emotive polyphony.

Notwithstanding the differences in media, the work of these three artists, living and working in Bruges in the second half of the fifteenth century, accomplished a similar task and for a similar purpose. This task was not simply a translation of a sacred text into the vernacular everyday – whether in words, images, or melody. Instead, the Salve Regina prayer remains a distinct element around which each work of art is wrapped, and all three artists use strategies of elaboration – on the theme of the antiphon and on the work of their predecessors – to protract the experience of the antiphon and its vernacular exegesis.

My argument, which operates by analogy among artistic forms, might remind the reader of Johan Huizinga's *Autumn of the Middle Ages*. In his influential history of fifteenth-century France and the Low Countries, Huizinga paints a vivid image of a civilization made up of interlocking cultural patterns like literature, art, and religion, all of which are pervaded by the same determining spirit of intensity. 'When the world was half a thousand years younger', writes Huizinga in the book's opening lines, 'all events had much sharper outlines than now. [...] every experience had that degree of directness and absoluteness, that joy and sadness still have in the mind of a child'.<sup>62</sup> In describing his synthetic vision of a society before rationalization, Huizinga often has recourse to the child simile: in his view, fifteenth-century people lacked the ability to see behind the curtain, so to speak – to understand art, for instance, as a matter of cause and effect.<sup>63</sup> Although my own

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<sup>62</sup> Huizinga J., *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Payton R. – Mammitzsch U. (Chicago: 1996) 1.

<sup>63</sup> Huizinga is very interested in "Art in Life," the title of his twelfth chapter – how aesthetic values are put to work for the court and religion – but he perceives

argument is informed by Huizinga's idea of intensity as a pervading value in the fifteenth century, I do not aspire to describe the contours of the 'medieval mind' as a general construction. Rather, I want to draw attention to a theme that I believe was consciously cultivated by particular people in a particular place at a particular time. As successful artists in late fifteenth-century Bruges, Obrecht, De Roovere, and Memling had an audience in common and perhaps even shared a set of patrons who appreciated their art. The motet, the poem, and the painting have a single purpose deriving from their shared source material – to praise Mary as powerful and merciful – and, as I have described, they each possess formal structures that draw out the worshiper's experience of gratitude toward her. In the remaining space of this article, I will argue that the ways in which the artworks foster a deeper and richer devotional experience point to the possibility that the audiences of Memling, Obrecht, and De Roovere were expected not only to appreciate the effects of their art but also to understand and value its mechanics, i.e., how those effects were achieved.

### *Patronage and Social Networks*

Although Bruges was a metropolis by fifteenth-century standards, with the third largest population north of the Alps, the cultural world of its most prominent citizens was geographically and socially circumscribed, largely defined by participation in a limited number of churches and confraternities.<sup>64</sup> Well-to-do merchants Tommaso Portinari, Willem Moreel, and Donaes de Moor shared a parish church, St. James, in which they all founded family chapels.<sup>65</sup> The Van Nieuwenhove fam-

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the audience's appreciation of art as limited: 'The contemporaries of the Van Eycks were clearly aware of two things in their admiration of the great paintings: first, of the proper representation of subject matter, and second, of the incredible skill, the fabulous perfection of the details and the absolute faithfulness to nature. On the one hand there is an appreciation that is located more in the sphere of piety than in the arena of aesthetic sensitivity; on the other hand there is a *naïve astonishment* that, in our opinion does not rise to the level of aesthetic sensitivity' [my italics]. Huizinga J., *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* 319.

<sup>64</sup> Paris was the largest, followed by Ghent. Blockmans W. – Prevenier W., *The Burgundian Netherlands* (Cambridge: 1986) 153.

<sup>65</sup> For a recent, very complete picture of the community of St. James, see Franke S., "Between Status and Spiritual Salvation: The *Portinari Triptych* and Tommaso Portinari's Concern for his *Memoria*", *Simolus* 33, 3 (2007–08) 123–141.

ily had their own chapel in the collegiate church of Our Lady, which also housed the guild chapel of the confraternity of Our Lady of Snow, to which Willem Moreel belonged.<sup>66</sup> Portinari was one of the leading organizers of the Our Lady of the Dry Tree confraternity along with Maarten van Nieuwenhove's cousin, Jan, Lord of Nieuwenhove.<sup>67</sup>

Artists offered these social networks occasions for interaction.<sup>68</sup> Anthonis de Roovere, in particular, was a ubiquitous presence in Bruges's social life. Besides being an active member of the Chamber of the Holy Ghost, he was involved in organizing major public events with functionaries of the Burgundian court and members of Our Lady of the Dry Tree.<sup>69</sup> And although De Roovere's name is not included on the membership roles of the Our Lady of Snow, his wife's is,<sup>70</sup> and the poet wrote at least one play for the confraternity, for the occasion of their August 5th feast day celebration.<sup>71</sup>

Hans Memling and Jacob Obrecht may not have been as active as De Roovere, but their art also played an important role in the city's devotional and cultural life. Memling, who was an Our Lady of Snow member,<sup>72</sup> painted devotional portrait triptychs for Willem Moreel and his wife Barbara van Vlaenderberch as well as for Tommaso

<sup>66</sup> For the Van Nieuwenhove family chapel, see Martens, "The Epitaph of Anna van Nieuwenhove" 37–42. For the members of Our Lady of Snow, see Vos D, *Hans Memling: The Complete Works* 36.

<sup>67</sup> My thanks to Frederik Buylaert for giving me his best guess about which of the numerous fifteenth-century Jan van Nieuwenhoves was the most likely member of Our Lady of the Dry Tree. Strohm R., *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* 72. For the Van Nieuwenhove family, see Martens M., "Some Reflections on the Social Function of Diptychs", in Hand J.O., – Spronk R. (eds.), *Essays in Context: Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych* (Cambridge: 2006) 89–90.

<sup>68</sup> And correspondingly, social networks offered a platform for new art forms. Anne-Laure van Bruaene makes the connection between the participation of the wealthy citizens of Bruges in social networks and the quick reception of artistic innovations like polyphony and the painting of the so-called Flemish Primitives. Bruaene, A-L van, *Om beters wille: Rederijkerskamers en Stedelijke Cultuur in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (1400–1650)* (Amsterdam: 2008) 42–43.

<sup>69</sup> Strohm R., *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* 72, 83. Most of the identified members of the Chamber of the Holy Ghost were wealthy tradesmen and some belonged to commercial elite of the city. Bruaene, A-L van, *Om beters wille: Rederijkerskamers en Stedelijke Cultuur in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (1400–1650)* 43.

<sup>70</sup> Brown A., "Bruges and the Burgundian 'Theatre-State': Charles the Bold and Our Lady of Snow." *History* 84 (1999) 581, n.

<sup>71</sup> Strohm R., *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* 83, 48. Whereas Strohm mentions a performance in 1475, Brown notes one in 1473. Brown A., "Bruges and the Burgundian 'Theatre-State' 581 n.

<sup>72</sup> Vos D. de, *Hans Memling: The Complete Works* 36.

Portinari and his wife Maria Baroncelli; these images were of comparable dimensions to Maarten van Nieuwenhove's diptych and probably served a similar purpose as the focus of personal devotion. Memling also painted large public works for the two men: an altarpiece, which was displayed in the Moreel family chapel, and a large single panel panorama representing Tommaso and Maria praying before the episodes of the Passion, which Portinari may have installed in his own chapel or donated to the Friars Observant.<sup>73</sup>

In the fifteenth century, music was almost as patron-driven an art form as painting. Masses and motets dedicated to the Virgin Mary were the earliest polyphonic compositions recorded in the Netherlands and were among the most popular votive foundations.<sup>74</sup> In 1434, Johannes Scateraers made the initial endowment for a weekly singing of the *Salve Regina* in polyphony at St. Donatian's.<sup>75</sup> In the 1490s, Our Lady of the Dry Tree hired members of Obrecht's choir at St. Donatian's to sing its weekly polyphonic Lady-Mass.<sup>76</sup> In addition to foundations that provided for the performance of existing music, the composition of new music could also be commissioned. Although Obrecht's music has been transmitted in sources that offer no information about the dating or commission of particular pieces, historians of music have been able to build a rough chronology of his work based on its formal qualities and use of *cantus firmi*, thereby deducing the circumstances that gave rise to particular pieces.<sup>77</sup> Among Obrecht's many Mass settings written in Bruges, it is likely that several were commissioned by individuals, such as his *De Sancto Donatiano* Mass

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<sup>73</sup> Vos, *Hans Memling: The Complete Works* 109, thinks the panel was displayed in St. James.. Franke, "Between Status and Spiritual Salvation" 138, believes Hugo van der Goes's *Portinari Altarpiece* was intended for display in the chapel, and makes an equally plausible suggestion that Memling's panel was donated to the Friars Observant, of whom Portinari was a patron. Regardless of its original location, it was publicly accessible in Bruges in 1515 when copies were made of it.

<sup>74</sup> Haggh B., "The Meeting of Sacred Ritual and Secular Piety: Endowments for Music", in Knighton, – Fallows (eds.), *The Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music* 67.

<sup>75</sup> Stroh, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* 23.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 71–72. Ibid., 68, also notes that the Chamber of the Holy Ghost regularly performed music as well as plays.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Bloxam M. J., "Plainsong and Polyphony for the Blessed Virgin: Notes on Two Masses by Jacob Obrecht", *The Journal of Musicology* 12, 1 (Winter 1994) 51–75.

that was commissioned by the widow of Donaes de Moor in memory of her husband.<sup>78</sup>

### *The Challenges and Rewards of Complexity*

Whether explicitly commissioned or written by the composer as a gift to the community that he served, Obrecht's *Salve Regina* motet for three voices is, as Strohm writes, 'audience-driven music'. The success of the work was determined by whether or not its listeners could detect its relationship to the instrumental polyphonic songs that were played by the city minstrels in the same church, perhaps directly after it was sung. The interplay of the market square and church nave enacted in the motet brought the *Salve's* praise of the Virgin closer to the lives, and the hearts, of its audience, and it also introduced a metalevel to the artwork. The audience, in recognizing that the sacred song was integrated with a form of vernacular music-making, would have become aware of the composition as an artwork, a precisely constructed and well-thought-out piece of music.<sup>79</sup> Likewise, the audiences of Memling and De Roovere were required to draw upon their knowledge of prior works of art in their reception of the *Maarten van Nieuwenhove Diptych* and *Lof van Maria*.

The apparent immediacy of the scene depicted in the *Maarten van Nieuwenhove Diptych* is actually the product of considerable artistic premeditation. The likeness of Maarten, with its enraptured, open-mouthed stare, seems especially close and directly observed, as if he might break out of his reverie and extend his hands through the picture plane. This effect derives not only from Memling's skill as a portraitist but also from the shallow space of the image; the backdrop of the wall directly behind Maarten, which seems to push him forward, was composed with linear perspective, Memling's only known use of the technique.<sup>80</sup> All of Memling's half-length devotional portrait diptychs and

<sup>78</sup> Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* 57; Wegman, *Born for the Muses* 139.

<sup>79</sup> On visual skill, see also Rothstein B., *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York: 2005).

<sup>80</sup> See the results of technical research from the *Prayers and Portraits* exhibition: Hand J.O. – Spronk R. – Metzger C., "Material and Technical Aspects of the Netherlandish Diptych", in *Prayers and Portraits: Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych* (New Haven: 2006) 292.

triptychs are elaborations on the form as it was developed by Rogier van der Weyden, but Memling reaches toward a new level of emulative quotation in the *Van Nieuwenhove Diptych*.

The convex mirror motif has a long history in Netherlandish painting, with a special pedigree in Bruges as a prominent feature in Jan van Eyck's portrait of Giovanni di Nicola Arnolfini and his wife [Fig. 6].<sup>81</sup> Judging from the evidence of the *Van Nieuwenhove Diptych*, it is possible that Memling knew Van Eyck's painting, and there are historical indications that Memling's patrons knew it as well.<sup>82</sup> In the 1460s, the portrait was probably in the possession of Giovanni di Arrigo Arnolfini, the cousin of Nicola Arnolfini and an active member of the confraternity of Our Lady of the Dry Tree with Tommaso Portinari and Jan, Lord of Nieuwenhove. At some point after Arrigo Arnolfini died in 1472, the painting came into the possession of Diego de Guevara, the first recorded owner of the *Arnolfini Portrait* and the owner of a devotional portrait diptych by Memling's putative assistant Michel Sittow.<sup>83</sup> However, even if Maarten van Nieuwenhove or the people to whom he chose to show his painting were unacquainted with Van Eyck's original, they probably would have known the pictorial tradition of convex mirrors, of which the *Arnolfini Portrait* is the origin, or at least a very early example. Three exemplars of this tradition are *The Werl Altarpiece* (1438), the *St. Eligius* (1449) by Petrus Christus (also resident in Bruges) and *The Money Changer and His Wife* (1514) by Quentin Massys.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>81</sup> The mirror in the Arnolfini is often mentioned in discussions of the *Van Nieuwenhove Diptych*. See, for instance, Vos, *Hans Memling: The Complete Works* 297; Ridderbos B., "Objects and Questions", in Ridderbos B. – Veen H. van – Buren A. van (eds.), *Early Netherlandish Paintings: Rediscovery, Reception, Research* (Los Angeles: 2005) 145.

<sup>82</sup> Barbara Lane has argued that Memling was strongly influenced by his Bruges predecessors, Van Eyck and Petrus Christus. See Lane B., "The Question of Memling's Training", in Verougstraete H. – Schoute R. van – Smeyers M (eds.), *Memling Studies. Proceedings of the International Colloquium (Bruges, 10–12 November 1994)* (Leuven: 1997) 61–70. For another argument concerning the emulation of Van Eyck in the fifteenth century, see Ridderbos B., *De Melancholie van de Kunstenaar: Hugo van der Goes en de Oudnederlandse Schilderkunst* ('s-Gravenhage: 1991) 9–46.

<sup>83</sup> For this provenance, see Campbell L., *The Fifteenth-Century Netherlandish Schools* (London: 1998) 192–198.

<sup>84</sup> These paintings are currently in the Prado Museum, Madrid; the Met Museum, New York; and the Louvre Museum, Paris. For an important reevaluation of the authorship of the *Werl Altarpiece*, see the catalogue entry in Kemperdick S. – Sander J. (eds.) *The Master of Flémalle and Rogier van der Weyden* (Berlin: 2008) 285–290.





Fig. 6. Jan van Eyck, *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434). London, National Gallery.  
© The Art Archive / National Gallery London / Eileen Tweedy

Although the prominence of the mirror in Memling's diptych calls attention to its relationship to the Eyckian tradition, the content of the reflection, and what it says about the image itself, differs significantly from the paintings mentioned above. In the *Arnolfini Portrait*, the mirror hanging on a wall at the far side of the portrayed room reveals the otherwise undepicted presence of a man in red and a man in blue [Fig. 7]. Arguing for the image as a document of the Arnolfini wedding, Panofsky identifies these figures as Van Eyck and a companion, who witness the marriage of the Arnolfinis, and he points to the authoritative statement of the artist's signature above the mirror: *Johannes de Eyck fuit hic 1434* (Jan van Eyck made this, 1434).<sup>85</sup> Regardless of whether or not the portrait was intended to serve a documentary function, the presence of the signature and the reflection of the mirror impart a historical truth value to the image; the painted scene becomes the room as seen from a vantage point on the other side of the picture plane. The space of the painting is confirmed as clearly contiguous with real space, but the time of the painting is placed in the past tense.<sup>86</sup> The three later paintings use the mirror in an analogous manner, to reflect external figures that witness the scene, thereby rendering the image as a record of something that was seen by someone (else) at a particular time.

Memling's mirror serves the opposite purpose, complicating the boundary between pictorial space and real space. On the one hand, the image pulls away from the viewer. Whereas the reflection in the *Arnolfini* mirror makes the image of the couple something witnessed by figures that stand in the same room on the other side of the picture plane, the reflection in the *Van Nieuwenhove* mirror blocks the place in which the external witness might stand with the substantial silhouette of Mary. And the viewer is made aware of his own exclusion from the space of the room and the painting by the conflation of picture frames

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<sup>85</sup> Panofsky E., *Early Netherlandish Painting* (Cambridge, MA: 1953) 201–203. Yvonne Yiu points out the connection between the presence of a mirror in fifteenth- and sixteenth- century paintings and self-portraiture: Yiu Y., “Der Spiegel: Werkzeug des Künstlers oder Metapher der Malerei? Zur Deutung des Spiegels in Produktions-szenarien in der nordischen Malerei des 15. frühen 16. Jahrhunderts”, *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 4 (2005) 475–488.

<sup>86</sup> For an interpretation of the Arnolfini mirror that comes to the opposite conclusion, see Seidel L., “The Value of Verisimilitude in the Art of Jan Van Eyck”, *Yale French Studies* 80 (1991) 25–43. For an interesting discussion of illusionism and the contiguity of real and pictorial space, see Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality* esp. 50–56.





Fig. 7. Jan van Eyck, *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434). London, National Gallery. © The Art Archive / National Gallery London / Eileen Tweedy. Detail of mirror

with window frames.<sup>87</sup> Yet on the other hand, the image extends itself in the form of the small piece of red cloak that is represented on the frame. Further, because there is no witness reflected by the mirror to place the representation in a historical moment, the time of the image is moved to the present tense of the viewer. This confusion is the core of the unresolved dialectic of close and distant, and sorting through it provides the viewer with the occasion to cultivate the feelings of tenderness and the sense of awe that are both present in the *Salve Regina*.

<sup>87</sup> Andrea Pearson also points to the emphasized exclusion of the viewer in the image: Pearson A., *Envisioning Gender in Burgundian Devotional Art, 1350–1550. Experience, Authority, Resistance* (Aldershot: 2005) 177.

The mirror can serve its purpose in Memling's composition whether or not the viewer knows the earlier painting, but to fully appreciate the cleverness of the mirror's conception, you have to know the Eyckian mirror and the role that it plays in his image.

Anthonis De Roovere's *Lof van Maria* might be likewise a response to the challenge of a particular Bruges predecessor as well as to a longer tradition of vernacular paraphrases. The early fifteenth-century poet Jan van Hulst, who may have been a founder of the Chamber of the Holy Ghost (legendarily founded on April 1, 1428), wrote a *Salve Regina* paraphrase in Middle Dutch that is preserved in the Gruuthuse Manuscript (fols. 6<sup>r</sup>–7<sup>v</sup>) from around 1400.<sup>88</sup> The paraphrase is 296 lines of complex sentence structure, neologisms, and intricate rhymes.<sup>89</sup> Van Hulst begins every line with a letter from the Latin text, stacking them as an acrostic so that the original words of the prayer can be read vertically ('Sonder smette zaliche roze / Acoleye preciose / Lelie vul der zuuerheit'). In his version, De Roovere elaborates on the tradition of Middle Dutch paraphrases by creating a semantic relationship between Latin and Middle Dutch, incorporating the meaning of the Latin word into the vernacular paraphrase.<sup>90</sup> Further, he does so in the space of a single line while maintaining the rigid structure of his rhyme scheme. The difficulty of the task is discernible in the lines that are not completely successful. The first stanza's third line is passable as long as the poem remains bilingual. However, when it is fully translated it becomes apparent that De Roovere has ignored the genitive ending of *Misericordie* ('MISERICORDIE des zondaers wtgelesen' means literally 'OF MERCY for sinners exquisite'). In the Latin text, the mercy that is possessive of the Queen – Mercy's Queen or the Queen of Mercy – is dislodged by 'hemel' (heaven) in the paraphrase's second line. In order to break up the phrase 'Queen of Mercy', De Roovere departs from his

<sup>88</sup> Oosterman, *De Gratie van het Gebed* 196–200, very tentatively endorses the idea that Gruuthuse Van Hulst and the founder of Our Lady of the Dry Tree are one and the same. He notes that there is a lot of overlap between the Gruuthuse circle of poets and the Chamber of the Holy Ghost in their relationships to the Gruuthuse family and the Our Lady of the Dry Tree confraternity.

<sup>89</sup> Oosterman, "A Prayer of One's Own" 732–733.

<sup>90</sup> For the continuity of form in rhyming prayer between the Gruuthuse poems and the fifteenth-century Bruges tradition, see Oosterman, *De Gratie van het Gebed* 153–165. For the diffusion of the Gruuthuse poems, see Oosterman, "Pronkzucht en Devotie. De Overlevering van de Gebeden in het Gruuthusehandschrift", in Willaert F. (ed.), *Een Zoet Akkoord. Middeleeuwse Lyriek in de Lage Landen* (Amsterdam: 1992) 187–206.

by-and-large seamless integration of the Latin original with the Middle Dutch expansion. J.J. Mak, De Roovere's modern editor, notes this with the observation that the elaborate difficulty of the poem's structure resembles works written by the members of the *Mariën Theeren*, a sixteenth-century Ghent rhetorical chamber that codified the challenge of creating intricate and delicate works of art for the Virgin into a formal competition.<sup>91</sup> De Roovere's bravura performance is intended to build an even more ornate edifice in praise of Mary than his Middle Dutch predecessors – the more artificed and complex, the better.

Cleverness, or complexity, was not an unambiguously positive quality in religious art, and in the fifteenth century, its value was most acutely at stake in the field of sacred music. The desire to return to the simplicity of the early church that motivated the reform movements of the sixteenth century had an early precedent in the attempted regulation of polyphonic singing. In his recent book *The Crisis of Music in Early Modern Europe*, Rob Wegman describes the growth of the belief that church music should be sung as it was in the time of the church fathers, meaning in monophonic chant. Many complaints about polyphony resemble those of Cardinal Domenico Capranica (1400–58) who likened the singers of Pope Nicolas V to a sack full of piglets 'in that one could hear the loud din of people shouting but not make anything of it'.<sup>92</sup> Capranica's remark registers two basic criticisms. First, the cardinal voices his anxiety that the important sense of the liturgical words is lost in the rhythmic complications and undulating voices of polyphony. This is a failure of function that would irritate Erasmus decades later.<sup>93</sup> In Obrecht's *Salve Regina*, the problem of comprehensibility is ameliorated by the motet's structure. The composer could have reasonably expected that his audience had memorized and recited the words to an antiphon like the *Salve Regina* in both Latin and the vernacular, and his motet has landmarks of monophonic plainsong

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<sup>91</sup> Mak, *De Gedichten* 46. Oosterman, *De Gratie van het Gebed* 195, makes a similar observation.

<sup>92</sup> As quoted in Wegman, *The Crisis of Music in Early Modern Europe, 1470–1530* (New York: 2005) 24.

<sup>93</sup> In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Erasmus writes, 'Not to mention that a type of music has meanwhile been brought into divine worship in which not a single word can be perceived clearly. Nor do those who engage in this humming have a free moment to pay attention to what they are singing'. For a discussion of Erasmus's critique of polyphony, see Wegman, *The Crisis of Music* 161.

that state the text clearly, so that listeners would be able to follow the progress of the antiphon.<sup>94</sup>

The other criticism couched in Capranica's comment comparing the singers to a sack full of piglets presents a more difficult issue as a joke about quality. Although western European choirs in the fifteenth century undoubtedly had their share of bad singers, it is very unlikely that any of those piglets would have been among the pope's singers. Instead, it seems that the cardinal did not enjoy or appreciate the refined achievements of polyphonic music nor the musicians who performed it. In his treatise *Complexus effectuum musices* of 1474/75, the composer and early theorist of music Johannes Tinctoris<sup>95</sup> defended polyphony by arguing that critics like the cardinal did not enjoy the music because they could not understand it:

And [music] makes some more joyful and others less. For the more one has attained perfection in this art the more one is delighted by it since one apprehends its nature both inwardly and outwardly. Inwardly through the intellective power, through which one understands proper composition and performance, and outwardly through the auditive power, through which one perceives the sweetness of consonances. Only such are truly able to judge and take delight in music.... However, music brings less joy to those who perceive in it nothing more than sound, and who are indeed delighted only through the external sense.<sup>96</sup>

In Bruges, Obrecht's music was never directly threatened by critics;<sup>97</sup> however, the terms of the debate about polyphony highlight crucial issues concerning the appreciation of sacred art and the importance of proper reception. In order to get the most basic religious benefit from Obrecht's *Salve Regina*, the listener must experience some pleasure in

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<sup>94</sup> Many contemporary *Salve* motets have the same structure, but Obrecht was singled out for praise for his sensitive treatment of words by Mattheus Herbenus of Maastricht in his *De natura cantus miraculis vocis* (1496). Wegman, *The Crisis of Music*.

<sup>95</sup> Johannes Tinctoris (1435?–1511) was a native of the Burgundian Netherlands. From 1472, he worked at the Neapolitan court. In addition to composing music, he wrote twelve treatises during the 1470s, including the earliest known dictionary of musical terms. See "Johannes Tinctoris", in Knighton – Fallows (eds.), *The Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music* 412–13. Tinctoris mentions Obrecht among the great composers of his age: see Wegman, *The Crisis of Music* 65.

<sup>96</sup> As quoted in Wegman, *The Crisis of Music* 63–64.

<sup>97</sup> The political and social instability in the Netherlands was a much greater threat to Obrecht's music. St. Donation's was unable to pay the salaries of their musicians in the year 1489–90 because of conditions in the city during the uprising against Maximilian. Wegman, *The Crisis of Music* 39.

listening to it. Polyphonic motets like Obrecht's were written in order to lift up the hearts of their audience in rhapsodic celebration of the Virgin. With the singers clustered around a painting or sculpture of Mary during a Salve service, the soaring voices of the motet would have elicited the same pleasurable feelings of tenderness and awe as the visual representations of her. But according to Tinctoris, only those who had understanding of what he calls 'proper composition and performance' could truly enjoy the structure of polyphonic music and, by extension, its sacred purpose. The more profound pleasure, which outlasts the short moments of performance, is the pleasure of understanding the difficulty and complexity of the work and thereby comprehending the value of the accolade given to Mary.

### *Conclusion*

All three compositions can be interpreted as gifts to Mary, offered to her by the artists who made them and by the patrons who commissioned them. They are all beautiful creations, as befits the Virgin, and they can be enjoyed simply for their beauty, or for how their beauty reflects that of their subject. Beyond the initial aesthetic pleasure, the motet, painting, and poem each present a great deal of complexity to unravel. Their elaborate structures are balancing acts, incorporating references to the everyday experience of their audience and to the exemplary work of artistic precursors. They would have pleased an audience that was capable of enjoying them outwardly, but they would have been best appreciated by a group of people with a cultivated interest in their workings. The casual observer might miss the Eyckian element of Memling's mirror, the reference to the minstrels' polyphony in Obrecht's motet, or the challenge of Van Hulst's Gruuthuse Salve Regina in De Roovere's paraphrase, but an educated audience could have enjoyed the cleverness of both the product and process of reference in the works.

The members of Bruges's relatively small, dense, and wealthy community were the perfect patrons for this type of art. Not only could they afford to patronize art, they all knew each other, they all knew the same artists, and probably, they all knew who was commissioning what from whom. Anthonis de Roovere could unite them on a large scale for events like the wedding of Charles the Bold, but he also could bring them together on a smaller scale to talk about or

read his Marian poetry. St. Donatian's daily Salve concerts were public events that drew Bruges citizens and visitors alike to enjoy, discuss, and respond to music like Obrecht's motet. In a similar vein, Maarten van Nieuwenhove, Tommaso Portinari, and Willem Moreel may have discussed their devotional portraits by Memling with each other. In a dense social environment like this, it was not enough just to patronize the right artists; one also had to demonstrate that one understood what one was paying for, looking at, listening to. Under these circumstances, a complex composition was also an especially prestigious one.

The familiarity of the Salve Regina made it an especially apt subject for this kind of art. Its use as both an oft-repeated prayer and part of the liturgy meant that the words of the prayer, in Latin and the vernacular, were universally known and their meaning was fixed. The Virgin's majesty and generosity were stable constants, comfortably taken for granted by the works' fifteenth-century audiences. Within these secure parameters, the three artists could play with form, experimenting with how the prayer's themes of elevation and distance were expressed. Because of their very ubiquity, Mary's exemplary qualities and the words used to communicate them could be formally stretched, extended, and riffed upon without loosening their meaning.

I have argued that the relationship between the three works of art under consideration derives from not only the circumstances of production – meaning the dense social networks of Bruges – but also the desire for a certain experience of reception. These formally adventurous compositions do not aspire to be artfully artless, like the works of *sprezzatura* in the century following; instead, they make the difficulty of their achievements plain. The area in which it is easiest to perceive the skill with which they were constructed is in their linking of the vernacular and Latin, the world of everyday experience and the realm of the eternal sacred. They do not leave their seams showing (so to speak) to simply reward the connoisseur and celebrate the author; the display of difficulty also has a role to play in the religious function of the works.

In their media-specific ways, each work sets the tempo of its reception and thereby determines the duration and cadence of the devotional experience. Obrecht's use of melisma and counterpoint is the most obvious method of drawing out duration, but De Roovere and Memling use their own means to prolong and sustain the time that the reader/viewer spends with their works. All three compositions stagger

the process of reception by leading the reader/viewer first through what is most easily comprehensible, (plain song, Middle Dutch, illusionism), followed by what requires more effort (polyphony, Latin, the mirror). And finally, all three works ask their audience to contemplate their bridging of sacred and profane, liturgical and vernacular, and to reflect on how these bridges are built. The unfolding of each stage of reception requires another moment spent in consideration of the work of art. And within the extended duration of reception, a space is opened up for meditation on the generosity of the art works themselves, their makers, their patrons, and of course, that of the Virgin.



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# GOING LOCAL: THREE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY FLORENTINE VIEWS ON DONATELLO'S *ST. GEORGE*

Lex Hermans

Comparisons, or analogies, between changes in languages, on the one hand, and the plastic arts and architecture, on the other, can be very useful, even illuminating, provided one keeps in mind that the objects of study are different in kind. In this essay, I will use late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century views of the Italian or Tuscan vernacular as a living, autonomous language as an *analogon* for art, and argue that it is more fruitful to establish definitions of vernacular art on what contemporaries thought of as indigenous rather than on modern categories such as high versus low or folk versus polite. Three sixteenth-century texts by, respectively, Anton Francesco Doni, Antonfrancesco Grazzini, and Francesco Bocchi on Donatello's statue of St. George at Orsanmichele in Florence, which these authors considered an icon of original Florentine art, will be discussed in order to show what range of vernacular meanings such an icon could bear.<sup>1</sup>

## I

In Latin, the word *verna* was originally used to distinguish the home-born, house-bred slave from the more common *servus*, a slave who could, and often did, originate from far-away lands at the fringe of the Roman Empire.<sup>2</sup> *Vernacular* was the language of those slaves. Although theoretically it could be any of the many dialects and languages spoken in the Roman world, in common parlance the *sermo vernacula* was a domestic form of Latin, because that language, at least in the West,

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<sup>1</sup> I want to thank NWO (The Netherlands Institute for Scientific Research) for the grant that made research for this article possible. Unless indicated otherwise, translations of Italian and Latin texts are mine.

<sup>2</sup> *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P.W.G. Glare (Oxford: 1982) s.v. "uerna"; cf. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., eds. J.A. Simpson – E.S.C. Weiner (Oxford: 1989) s.v. "vernacular".

was the *lingua franca* of the upper classes and the many bodies of civil and military administration. With the exception of Greek, the speakers of Latin considered the various dialects of the empire rough and definitely lower class, unfit for official use or civil society. Local officials were expected to express themselves in Latin; the use of dialect and non-Latin languages was probably discouraged. In any case, nobody destined for a public career would think of using his language of origin if it was not Latinate, let alone be boastfully proud of it.

A second, more generalized meaning of *verna* was 'a common town-bred person', whose Latin was presumably not much different from that of house- or town-bred slaves. Notwithstanding its observed or imagined coarseness, this language must have had the ring of authenticity, for Roman language theorists such as Varro used the adjective *vernaculus* in the sense of 'indigenous' – and Varro most certainly meant Latin – as opposed to *peregrinus* ('foreign').<sup>3</sup> The various meanings of the two words amalgamated. For Romans the *lingua vernacula* was an average Latin spoken by local townsmen. In the late medieval and early modern European world, with its many regions and dialects, vernacular was the common language of a given region or province, spoken by all natives and inhabitants, irrespective of social class. On the Italian peninsula, it was usually called *volgare*, the language of the people, as opposed to Latin, the international language of the church, chanceries, and the intelligentsia.<sup>4</sup>

In Italy (from here on I will use the name in its loose geographical meaning), the vernacular, and the Tuscan dialect in particular, enjoyed considerable standing. As early as the first decade of the fourteenth century, Dante praised the *volgare* as a natural and noble language, better suited to poetic use than the more formal Latin. He defined it as the language little children effortlessly learn from their wet nurse.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Varro, *De lingua latina* 5.77: 'aquatiliū vocabula partim sunt vernacula partim peregrina'. On the implied coarseness of provincial Latin, see the remarks by the second century BCE Roman satirist Gaius Lucilius, who protested that he didn't write for the refined intelligentsia of Rome, but for the public in Taranto, Cosenza, and Sicily (Cicero, *De finibus* 1.3.7; cf. Cicero, *De oratore* 2.6.25).

<sup>4</sup> See *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, ed. S. Battaglia, vol. 21 (Turin: 2002) s.v. "volgare".

<sup>5</sup> Alighieri Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia* 1.1.2–3, ed. A. Marigo (Florence: 1937) 6–8: 'dicimus, celeriter actendentes, quod vulgaram locutionem appellamus eam qua infantes assuefiunt ab assistentibus cum primitus distinguere voces incipiunt; vel, quod brevis dici potest, vulgarem locutionem asserimus quam sine omni regula nutricem imitantes accipimus. Est et inde alia locutio secundaria nobis, quam Romani

In his own time Dante's view represented a minority, yet at the turn of the fifteenth century the majority of the literate classes would concur. Lorenzo de' Medici, called 'the Magnificent' (1449–1492), a well-educated prince and an elegant vernacular author in his own right, wrote in the *Comento* to his own verses that nobody could reprove him for writing 'in this language in which [he] was born and nurtured, the more so because Hebrew and Greek and Latin at their times were all maternal and natural languages'.<sup>6</sup> From Lorenzo's time onward the *volgare* became more and more the official language, although institutions aiming at a more international audience, such as the church and the universities, continued to communicate in Latin.<sup>7</sup>

Various factors contributed to the expansion of the vernacular into bureaucracy, historiography, and similar (semi-)official writing. First of all, local or regional language can be instrumental in community building and establishing links between the people and their rulers. The language of the people and the language of the court were essentially the same – as Pietro Bembo made one of his protagonists remark in *Prose della volgar lingua* (*Prose Writing in the Vernacular* [1525]) – even if the one was far less polished than the other.<sup>8</sup> In the sixteenth

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grammaticam vocaverunt. Hanc quidem secundariam Greci habent et alii, sed non omnes: ad habitum vero huius pauci perveniunt, quia non nisi per spatium temporis et studii assiduitatem regulamur et doctrinamur in illa. Harum quoque duarum nobilior est vulgaris: tum quia prima fuerit humano generi usitata; tum quia totus orbis ipsa perfruitur, licet in diversas prolationes et vocabula sit divisa; tum quia naturalis est nobis, cum illa potius artificialis existat.' The incomplete treatise dates from the years 1303–1305.

<sup>6</sup> Medici Lorenzo de', *Comento sopra alcuni suoi sonetti*, in idem, *Opere*, ed. A. Simioni, vol. 1 (Bari: 1913) 22: 'E per queste medesime ragioni nessuno mi può riprendere se io ho scritto in quella lingua nella quale io sono nato e nutrito, massime perché la ebraea e la greca e la latina erano nel tempo loro tutte lingue materne e naturali'. Rudolph Agricola, in a letter to Jacques Barbireau in 1484, opined that one's maternal language was the best basis for learning Latin, because 'Omnes enim, si quid in dicendo est vitii, facillime in eo perspicimus sermone, ad quem sumus nati': Agricola Rodolphus, *De formando studio epistola ad Iacobum Barbirianum* (Paris, Prigentius Caluarinus: 1550) 5; cf. Kooiman E., "The Letters of Rodolphus Agricola to Jacobus Barbirianus", in Akkerman P. – Vanderjagt A.J. (eds.), *Rodolphus Agricola Phrisius. Proceedings of the International Conference at the University of Groningen 28–30 October 1985* (Leiden: 1988) 136–146.

<sup>7</sup> Vitale M., *La questione della lingua*, new ed. (Palermo: 1978) 39. Rudolph Agricola wrote in the letter with which he dedicated his main work to Dietrich von Plienigen that he had written it in Latin because he didn't want to follow Lucilius, but instead liked to be read by a far wider community than his native Frisians: Agricola, Rodolphus, *De inventione dialectica libri tres*, ed. and trans. L. Mundt (Tübingen: 1992) 2.

<sup>8</sup> Bembo Pietro, *Prose e rime*, ed. C. Dionisotti (Turin: 1960) 107 (*Volgar lingua* 1.12).

century, the boosting of 'national' feelings was fuelled by the ravaging of the countryside and the menace to many cities by the foreign troops that had roamed over the peninsula ever since the French king Charles VIII invaded Italy (1494) to press his claim to the duchy of Milan. Foreign presence made itself felt most heavily during the first half of the century, peaking with the Sack of Rome (1527). In the last years of his pontificate, Pope Julius II (1503–1513) made every effort to forge Italian alliances to drive the enemy – in his time the French – out of the country. And although his rallying cry *fuori i barbari* ('barbarians out') is probably apocryphal, it very neatly sums up the feeling of many Italians.<sup>9</sup> The tides of nationalism, or Italianism to be more precise, no doubt stimulated the use and praise of the vernacular.

Also furthering the use of the vernacular were practical reasons, scholarly interests, and local pride. In Italy, using the vernacular rather than Latin in documents and publications made the content accessible to a far larger audience. The Venetian chronicler Marin Sanudo, who in his *Diarii* (*Diaries*) kept a daily record of 'everything' that happened in his city between 1498 and his death in 1536, consciously chose to write in his native tongue. It seems he felt the vernacular to be a pure mirror of the events described; by using the Venetian dialect he thus guaranteed the truthfulness of his work and at the same time made it open to 'whoever wishes to read it'.<sup>10</sup> A similar wish to serve a larger audience was voiced by the physician Girolamo Manfredi in the preface to his treatise on the plague (1478), stating that 'if we had written this work in Latin, it would not have been open to every man, because the common man would not have been able to understand it'.<sup>11</sup> And the Florentine priest Francesco Albertini, who in the first decades of the sixteenth century wrote an arts guidebook to Florence in the vernacular and a guide to the antiquities and churches of Rome in Latin, decided to translate a selection from the Roman guidebook into

<sup>9</sup> For Julius II's anti-French policy, see Shaw C., *Julius II. The Warrior Pope* (Oxford: 1996) 245–278; for the rallying cry, see *ibid.* 245.

<sup>10</sup> See Labalme P.H. – Sanguineti White L. (eds.), *Venice Città Excelentissima. Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo*, trans. L.L. Carroll (Baltimore: 2008) XX–XXI, XXIX, and 6 (quotation).

<sup>11</sup> Manfredi Girolamo, *Tractato degno et utile de la pestilentia* (Bologna, Johannes Schriber: 1478) preface: 'Si nui havessemo scripto questo opera per litera, non seria sta comune ad ogni homo, perche gli homini vulgari non l'haverian possuto intendere.' Quoted in Clarke G., "Architecture, Languages and Style in Fifteenth-Century Italy", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 71 (2008) 183 n. 68; I do not follow Clarke's translation of 'litera' as 'literary form', but take it in the sense of 'the scientific style', i.e., Latin (cf. note 12 below).

Italian on behalf of his friend Baccio da Montelupo, a sculptor, and 'several other devout persons of no Latin'.<sup>12</sup> As the basic literacy rate in the sixteenth century was higher than in the fifteenth, it is reasonable to assume that considerations such as those of Sanudo, Manfredi, and Albertini would move a growing number of authors to write in the vernacular.

Part of the growth of literacy was due to the humanists, who were active as scholars, teachers, and civil servants. Notwithstanding their primary focus on Latin, Greek, and sometimes Hebrew, it was unavoidable they would take an interest in the vernacular. The combination of rigorous philology and the quest for dependable sources could profitably be applied to the *volgare*, and the more so if the common language could be purified and standardized so as to become a worthy vehicle for literature and official writing. From Cristoforo Landino in the 1470s to Pietro Bembo in the 1520s and 1530s, there was a growing debate on how to refine and polish the vernacular, and, of particular interest to the Florentines, which Italian dialect was the most suitable to become the 'national' literary language.<sup>13</sup> It was Bembo, a perfect Latinist himself, who in *Prose della volgar lingua* defended the vernacular as capable of literary expression. Like Lorenzo de' Medici fifty years earlier, he presented Italian as a natural language into which people are born and in which they live every day, as opposed to Latin, which was as foreign to Italians as Greek was to the Romans. And he likens the inveterate Latinists to persons who build for themselves palaces in foreign lands, but in their own communities live in simple huts.<sup>14</sup>

In the same treatise, Bembo uses a botanical metaphor to argue that it is better to write in vernacular: 'the power of the native sky is always

<sup>12</sup> Albertini Francesco, *Memoriale di molte statue et picture sono nella ciptà di Fiorentia per mano di scultori & pictori eccellenti moderni & antiqui* [1510], ed. G. Milanese – C. Guasti – C. Milanese (Florence: 1863) 8: 'Lo opuscolo compuosi a Iulio ii. pontefice maximo, delle antiquità di Roma, et alchune cose di Florentia, mi pare superfluo traducere in volgare: tamen, per satisfarti, trarrò un fioretto de tucti e capitoli del primo, secundo et tertio libro [...] ma quello compuosi allo Imperatore Maximiliano, lo farò ancora in vulgare ad instantia di alcune persone devote senza littere'.

<sup>13</sup> See especially the standard work by Vitale, *Questione della lingua* 14–153. For the late fifteenth century, see Santoro M., "Cristoforo Landino e il volgare", *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 131 (1954) 501–547.

<sup>14</sup> Bembo, *Prose e rime* 79–80 (*Volgar lingua* 1.3). For this view, including the comparison of palaces and houses, see also Bembo's Latin poem "Ad Sempronium, a quo fuerat reprehensus, quod materna lingua scripserit" in *Carmina quinque illustrium poetarum*, ed. anon. (Bergamo, Pietro Lancelotti: 1753) 25. Sempronius was probably Ercole Strozzi, a staunch defender of Latin; cf. Bembo, *Prose e rime* 78 (*Volgar lingua* 1.2).

big, and in every soil it is better to put plants that naturally grow there than those that are brought in from far-away countries'.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps it was not only grocers' lore that inspired Bembo to this passage, but also the self-centred views and local pride common of Italian communities, covered by the modern term *campanilismo*, which derives from the notion that everything originating from farther abroad than what can be seen from a city's main bell tower (*campanile*) is foreign and potentially suspect, and what stems from inside this orbit is indigenous and basically good. A preference for the local dialect or the more inter-regional vernacular for official affairs fits seamlessly into this narrow outlook. *Campanilismo* and local pride can also help to understand why highly educated persons such as Francesco Bocchi, whose localizing views on Donatello's *St. George* will be presented in the third section of this essay, imputed to the vernacular a natural vigour: 'our language does not stand still, but instead is living, and even actively developing itself, thanks to the inventiveness of the people who were speaking it'.<sup>16</sup> Presumably, it was for its vibrant capacity of development that Bocchi preferred the vernacular to Latin, which the humanists had brought back to the point of the stylistic heights of Cicero and Tacitus, and then had frozen forever.<sup>17</sup>

## II

Of a period in which the verbal expression of a population enjoyed a rising status, one would expect that the works of visual expression show a similar pattern. After all, they originated within the same community and could serve as material tokens of its social and cultural coherence. In other words, as much as vernacular language, vernacular art and architecture ought to be capable of expressing local or regional

<sup>15</sup> Bembo, *Prose e rime* 86: 'la forza del natio cielo sempre è molta, e in ogni terra meglio mettono le piante che naturalmente vi nascono, che quelle che vi sono di lontano paese portate' (*Volgar lingua* 1.7).

<sup>16</sup> Bocchi Francesco, *Ragionamento sopra le prose vulgari di Mons. Della Casa* [1582], in Della Casa Giovanni, *Opere*, ed. veneta novissima, vol. 3 (Venice, Angiolo Pasinello: 1728) 22: 'non sia ferma questa nostra lingua, ma viva tuttavia, e cammini ancora per avanzarsi'; see also 23.

<sup>17</sup> A standard humanist's view on the status of Latin is voiced in Bembo, *Prose e rime* 131 (*Volgar lingua* 2.2): 'with its rust removed Latin now glitters in its ancient splendour'. For the idea that Latin was a dead language already since the time of Cicero, see Strohm W., *Latein ist tot, es lebe Latein. Kleine Geschichte einer grossen Sprache* (Berlin: 2007) 103–120.



characteristics. Here, however, one encounters two problems: one is that, whereas contemporaries have much debated the language question, they were virtually silent about its reflection in art; the second is the ambiguity inherent in current definitions of vernacular art. This ambiguity is mainly caused by the differentiation modern scholars tend to make between vernacular art, on the one hand, and high or polite style art, on the other.<sup>18</sup>

Instead of basing definitions on features of style, a more fruitful approach to defining vernacular art is, in my view, to look for what contemporaries considered as characteristic of the art produced in their own city, region, or state. For if we take their views on the *volgare* as our compass, it turns out that the distinction between indigenous and foreign was the main criterion, not high or low style. In this view, vernacular was purely an issue of reception, and by that token could include anything contemporaries considered (or wanted to consider) as belonging to their own tradition. Such an approach leaves room for simultaneity of opposite views (what was considered vernacular in, say, Florence could be dubbed foreign in Siena or Venice); makes it possible to understand why objects that to modern eyes are obviously different in provenance, period, and style could be subsumed under the label 'ours' while others, that to the same modern eyes are inextricably bound up with that tradition, were excluded as foreign; and allows for changes of labels over time. Here, it can be illuminating to keep in mind that Francesco Bocchi saw the vernacular as a living, vigorous, and developing language with its own characteristics, an aspect of the *volgare* that Pietro Bembo also had pointed out.<sup>19</sup> If the spoken vernacular was liable to change, the same must hold true for its visual complement.

How a change of perception over time was effected can be demonstrated by the view Italian artists at the end of the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth centuries developed on classicizing architecture as opposed to the Gothic style in buildings. (Unlike Gothic paintings or

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<sup>18</sup> See Alcock N.W., "Vernacular [Folk] Architecture", in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. J. Turner, vol. 32 (London: 1996) 273–274; cf. Harmon M., "Folk art – Problems of Analysis", in *Encyclopedia of World Art*, ed. M. Pallottino, vol. 5 (New York-Toronto-London: 1961) 452–455.

<sup>19</sup> See Bembo, *Prose e rime* 86 (*Volgar lingua* 1.7) on the development of the vernacular, which according to him took its words and forms from both Latin and from the Gothic and Langobard tongues and over time was shaped into an undeniably autonomous language.

statues, Gothic architecture, with its pointed arches, pinnacles, and the like, was immediately recognizable to the average observer. This made the built Gothic a rewarding object of vilification.) In the early 1460s, when Gothic architecture was still the standard while *all'antica* building was innovative and experimental, the sculptor and architect Antonio Averlino (called Filarete) wrote in his *Treatise on Architecture*:

Surely I beg everyone to abandon modern usage. Do not let yourself be advised by masters who hold to such bad practice. Cursed be he who discovered it! I think that only barbaric people could have brought it into Italy.<sup>20</sup>

As the entire treatise is an ingenious combination of designs based on viewing ancient ruins and Vitruvian ideas on building, 'modern' in this passage means 'not ancient' and hence 'Gothic', which the author saw as foreign, brought into the country by uncultured invaders. To his mind, Gothic was not vernacular. Half a century after Filarete, the painter Raphael wrote a letter to Pope Leo X (1519) – the phrasing of which was in large part or even entirely the work of Count Baldassare Castiglione, the author of the *Book of the Courtier* – in which the artist asks for protection and conservation of the ancient monuments in Rome, condemns papal leniency towards destruction for the benefit of stone quarrying and lime production, and states the superiority of ancient over modern forms.<sup>21</sup> He observes that there are three types of buildings in Rome: the ancient ones built before the Goths and other barbarians destroyed Rome; the buildings from the 'Gothic' period, from the invasion of Rome to the fall of the Western empire; and buildings in a rather undefined middle age between the Goths and Raphael's own time.<sup>22</sup> The buildings dating from imperial Rome

<sup>20</sup> Filarete, *Trattato di architettura*, ed. A.M. Finolini – L. Grassi, vol. 1 (Milan: 1972) 228–229: 'Sì che priego ciascuno che lasci andare questa usanza moderna, e non vi lasciate consigliare a questi maestri che usano questa tale praticaccia. Che maledetto sia chi la trovò! Credo che non fusse se non gente barbara che la condusse in Italia' (book 8, fol. 59<sup>v</sup>). Translation from Filarete, *Treatise on Architecture: Being the Treatise by Antonio di Piero Averlino, Known as Filarete*, trans. J.R. Spencer, vol. 1 (New Haven-London: 1965) 102.

<sup>21</sup> Golzio V., *Raffaello nei documenti, nelle testimonianze dei contemporanei e nella letteratura del suo secolo* (Rome: 1936) 113.

<sup>22</sup> Castiglione Baldassare, *Tutte le opere*, vol. 1: *Le lettere*, ed. G. La Rocca (Milan: 1978) 534: 'Gli edifici adunque moderni e de' tempi nostri sono notissimi, sì per esser nuovi, come ancor per non avere la maniera così bella come quelli del tempo degl'imperatori, né così goffa come quelli del tempo de' Gotti; di modo che, benché siano più distanti di spazio e di tempo, sono però più prossimi per la qualità, e posti

were built at great expense and in excellent style, Raphael remarks, and it was these that had to be imitated. The buildings of the Goths were 'wholly without grace or any style whatsoever' and 'unlike both ancient and modern'. The 'modern' or Gothic style Raphael calls 'German' and he considers it 'far removed from the good manner of the Romans and the antique'. And although acknowledging that some of his contemporaries, such as Bramante, nearly approached the antique style, Raphael bewails the fact that the German manner still persisted in many places. He, too, seems to consider this bad style something non-indigenous that should be eliminated as soon as possible. Giorgio Vasari's outburst against the Gothic style in the introduction to the first edition of the *Lives* (1550), arguably an expression of the prevailing sentiment at the time, is even more explicit and intense:

This manner was invented by the Goths, because after they ruined the ancient buildings and the architects had died in the wars, those who were left constructed their buildings in this style, with the arches turned in pointed segments, and filled all Italy with these abominations of buildings; so in order not to have any more of them their style has to be totally abandoned. May God protect every country from such ideas and style of buildings! They are such deformities in comparison with *the beauty of our buildings* that they are not worthy that I should talk more about them.<sup>23</sup>

With 'our buildings' Vasari does mean classicizing structures, without differentiating between genuinely ancient and contemporary classicism. Yet what he meant is unmistakable: by the middle of the sixteenth century, in architecture classicism had won the position of being considered indigenous; it was 'ours'.

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quasi tra l'uno e l'altro. E quelli del tempo de' Gotti, benché siano prossimi di tempo a quelli del tempo degl'imperatori, sono differentissimi di qualità, e come due estremi, lasciando nel mezzo li più moderni.'

<sup>23</sup> Vasari Giorgio, *Introduzione alle tre arti del disegno*, "Dell'architettura" 4, in idem, *Le opere*, ed. G. Milanesi, rev. ed., vol. 1 (Florence: 1906) 138: 'Questa maniera fu trovata dai Goti, che, per aver ruinate le fabbriche antiche e morti gli architetti per le guerre, fecero dopo coloro che rimasero le fabbriche di questa maniera: le quali girarono le volte con quarti acuti, e riempirono tutta Italia di questa maledizione di fabbriche, che per non averne a far più s'è dimesso ogni modo loro. Iddio scampi ogni paese dal venir tal pensiero ed ordine di lavori; che, per essere eglino talmente difforni *alla bellezza delle fabbriche nostre*, meritano che non se ne favelli più che questo.' Emphasis added. Translation from L.S. Maclehorse in Brown G.B. (ed.), *Vasari on Technique* (New York: 1960) 83–84, with some alterations.

## III

Much as certain styles of architectural form and ornament could be transformed in viewers' minds from indigenous to foreign or vice versa, people could likewise single out individual works of art and consider them 'typically ours'. Such is the case of the marble statue of St. George that the Florentine artist Donatello (1386–1466) sculpted in 1416–1418 [Fig. 1]. The statue was commissioned for one of the fourteen tabernacles intended for patron saints of the guilds on the four façades of Orsanmichele, a communal building originally used for the grain exchange that in 1380 was converted into a church.<sup>24</sup> From an early date the statue was much admired, and over time it also had a very good written press. Around 1460, Filarete praised it as a 'truly excellent and perfect figure' that expressed boldness.<sup>25</sup> In 1550, Vasari hailed it as an almost-living being:

For the Guild of Cuirass Makers [Donatello] made a most lively figure of St. George in armour, in the head of which one recognizes the beauty of youth, courage and valour in arms, a terribly intrepid liveliness, and a marvellous suggestion of movement inside this stone. And surely among the modern figures in marble there cannot as yet be observed such liveliness or such spirit as nature and art produced by the hand of [Donatello] in this one.<sup>26</sup>

Filarete and Vasari were artists, and as protagonists of *all'antica* design both had ulterior motives for singling out works of art for praise or damn. And indeed, Donatello's *St. George* is one of the earliest full-figure sculptures in which a certain ancient inspiration can be discerned. It has a quasi-Roman simplicity and firmness that are lacking in late-Gothic sculpture of the early fifteenth century. In many aspects, the *St. George* marks the transition from Gothic to a more classical

<sup>24</sup> For basic facts about the *St. George*, see Janson H.W., *The Sculpture of Donatello* (Princeton: 1963) 24–29; and Pope-Hennessy J., *An Introduction to Italian Sculpture*, 4th ed., vol. 2 (London: 1996) 16–20, 348–349.

<sup>25</sup> Filarete, *Trattato* vol. 2, 658: 'se tu hai a fare santo Antonio, non si vuole fare timido, ma pronto; e così san Giorgio, come fece Donatello, il quale veramente è una figura ottima e perfetta, la quale figura è di marmo, a Orto San Michele di Firenze'.

<sup>26</sup> Vasari, *Opere* vol. 2, 403: 'All'Arte de' Corazzaj; fece una figura di San Giorgio armato, vivissima; nella testa della quale si conosce la bellezza nella gioventù, l'animo ed il valore nelle armi, una vivacità fieramente terribile, ed un maraviglioso gesto di muoversi dentro a quell sasso. E certo, nelle figure moderne non s'è veduta ancora tanta vivacità, nè tanto spirito in marmo, quanto la natura e l'arte operò con la mano di Donato in questa'.



Fig. 1. Donatello, *St. George* (1416–1418). Marble. Originally Orsanmichele, Florence; now in the Bargello, Florence. Photo: CKD Nijmegen

design, and can be seen as experimental. Needless to say that modern art historians consider the statue an exponent of high art.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Donatello was generally considered the equal of the ancients, his fame based in the first place on his capacity of making his statues very vivid and lifelike, qualities then thought to be typical of the ancient Greeks and Romans.<sup>27</sup> Yet sixteenth-century Florentines did not necessarily share Vasari's interest in classicism or the development of art. Their praise of the *St. George* was often based on its expressing things such as local artistic excellence, civic spirit, or the memory of Florence's heroic republican past. What follows are three examples of local views on Donatello's statue, all written in the third quarter of the sixteenth century by Florentine authors who were full of local pride.

Anton Francesco Doni (1513–1574), the son of a scissor maker in the San Lorenzo district, was a married ex-monk who tried to live off his pen, in which enterprise he was less successful than his colleague *poligrafo* Pietro Aretino. Most of his work was published only once, often in bad editions, and did not provoke much written response. Yet in his writing he showed a propensity for debate and a gift for sharp and witty phrasing, which was enhanced by his consequent use of the regional Tuscan spoken by the Florentine lower classes. All his life he remained faithful to the vernacular of his youth.<sup>28</sup> Doni was a critic of his times, in particular of the social and political evils of his native Florence, and abhorred the selfishness of the upper classes. In his writings, he voiced the worries and sympathies of the working classes, and his tone sounds remarkably authentic.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> For testimonies to Donatello's fame written between 1424 and 1550, see Appendix A in Pfisterer U., *Donatello und die Entdeckung der Stile 1430–1445* (Munich: 2002) 488–529, especially the numbers 10 (Flavio Biondo), 14 (Bartolomeo Fazio), 32 (Cristoforo Landino), 45 (Raffaele Maffei), 57 (Antonio Billi), 59 (Paolo Giovio), 63 (the 'anonimo magliabecchiano'), 67 (Sabba da Castiglione), and 76 (Giovambattista Gelli), in which the artist is praised as equal of the ancients; and the numbers 10 (Biondo), 14 (Fazio), 35 (Ugolino Verino), 38 (Aurelio Bienato), 57 (Billi), 63 ('anonimo'), and 76 (Gelli), which all stress the lifelike qualities of Donatello's statues.

<sup>28</sup> For basic biographical facts, see Romei A. – Longo A., "Doni, Anton Francesco", in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* vol. 41 (Rome: 1990) 158–167. For bibliographical reference, see Masi G., "Anton Francesco Doni", on <http://www.nuovorinascimento.org/cinquecento/doni.pdf> (version February 22, 2010, accessed January 2011).

<sup>29</sup> See Grendler P.F., *Critics of the Italian World (1530–1560)*. *Anton Francesco Doni, Nicolò Franco and Ortensio Lando* (Madison-Milwaukee-London: 1969) 49–65.

The third part of Doni's volume of literary fantasies, *I marmi* (*The Marbles* [1552]), opens with a narrative about the virtue of modesty. It bears the subtitle "Chance, or Fortune, or Fate often makes someone to occupy a place (by putting him up in front) that he doesn't deserve; and very often one who is worthy of honour remains aside and behind."<sup>30</sup> The story pops up in a conversation between a 'foreign academic' who wants to visit the most important sites of Florence and his Florentine host, who first takes him to Donatello's *St. George*. The foreigner cries out in admiration: 'Oh, how beautiful! Oh, what a beautiful figure! Oh, it's wonderful; it's one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen!' To this outburst of tourist enthusiasm, the Florentine reacts by telling that the statue once did speak. Of course the visitor thinks his host is making fun of him, but the Florentine protests that he is not. And to prove he is serious, he asks the statue to recount why it talked, and the statue courteously obliges. It tells about a stonemason who until his death had visited the *St. George* twice a day and engaged him in 'the most beautiful conversations one might hear'. One day the mason was very upset, because he had seen that Baccio Bandinelli's marble group *Hercules and Cacus* (1534) was installed on the *ringhiera*, the platform in front of the Palazzo della Signoria. Thus, it shared the place of honour with Michelangelo's *David*. The stonemason was outraged, he told the statue, 'to see you put aside in this place, and that one at the principal and most beautiful site of all', for he thought Bandinelli's creation far inferior to the *St. George*. In order to soothe the mason, the statue says to him: 'To me it's enough to deserve that place more than him, although fortune and fate have taken that one there, and I by good chance have occupied my own site. Never fret, for I don't think it is worse to deserve a chair when there isn't any around than to be put on one and not to deserve it – on the contrary!' With this statement the statue concludes its story and the text returns to the visitors of the statue, who both paraphrase in the peroration the words of the statue.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Doni Anton Francesco, *I marmi*, ed. P. Fanfani, vol. 2 (Florence: 1863) 7: 'La Ventura, o la Fortuna, o la Sorte fa occupare il luogo talvolta a tale (mettendolo innanzi) che non lo merita; e chi è degno d'onore bene spesso si rimane da parte e adietro'.

<sup>31</sup> The whole narrative: Doni, *Marmi* vol. 2, 7–12; quotations, respectively, at 7: 'Peregrino. 'O bello! o che bella figura! oh l'è mirabile! ell'è delle belle cose che io vedessi mai!'; 8: 'i più bei ragionamenti che si potessino udire'; 9: 'il veder te in questo luogo da parte, e quello nel principale et universale bellissimo sito'; 9: 'A me basta di meritarlo quel luogo meglio di lui, se ben la fortuna e la sorte v'ha condotto quello, e

Apart from being a very lively piece of literature in the vernacular, the story Doni tells here served many purposes. Clever enough, the author puts the extreme praise of the *St. George* in the mouth of the foreigner, who thus confirms the artistic excellence of the Florentine sculptor Donatello over all other sculptors. Second, he suggests that this art work is so homely, so unpretentious, and at the same time so attractive that a common artisan is perfectly happy to see it every single day and share his joys and worries with it. Third, he uses this much-admired statue – which was always on view for everyone who wanted to see it – to impart a lesson in private morality that also could apply to the public sphere. And fourth, this story enabled Doni to express his views on the ‘contest’ between the modern statues put up on the square in front of the Palazzo Vecchio, which at the time of the story served as living quarters and offices of Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici (1519–1574), who expressly ordered the installation of Bandinelli’s *Hercules and Cacus* on the *ringhiera*. Through the main characters of his fiction, the author passes judgment on the artistic value of Bandinelli’s manner. Doni, although a friend of the artist, probably disapproved of Bandinelli’s rather stiff *all’antica* manner because he disliked that it was meant to support the image of classical rectitude adopted by Cosimo I in order to veil the reach of his essentially absolutist power. Although never an open opponent of the Medici, Doni nursed republican sympathies, and his verdict on Bandinelli’s *maniera* was an implicit and prudent way to vent political criticism. Conversely, the statue of *St. George* was a vehicle for promoting old Florentine values.<sup>32</sup>

Antonfrancesco Grazzini (1505–1584), born in the parish of San Pier Maggiore, was of even more outspoken Florentine calibre than Doni.<sup>33</sup> As a founding member of the literary Accademia degli Umidi

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per buona ventura m’abbia occupato il mio sito: datti pazienza, perchè io non reputo manco meritare un seggio, non vi essendo, che esservi posto e non esser degno: anzi più’.

<sup>32</sup> Modern scholarship on Doni’s views of art is scant; see the bibliography by Masi. See also Rossi M., “Teoria sull’arte e artisti nei *Marmi* tra Firenze e Venezia”, paper presented at the conference “Mangiar libri e inghiottire scritture. *I Marmi* di Anton Francesco Doni: la storia, i generi e le arti”, Pisa, January 15, 2010 (to be published). For *Hercules and Cacus*, see Pope-Hennessy, *An Introduction to Italian Sculpture* vol. 3, 130–133; cf. Heikamp D., “Zum *Herkules und Kakus* von Baccio Bandinelli”, in Torella R. (ed.), *Le parole e i marmi. Studi in onore di Raniero Gnoli nel suo 70° compleanno* vol. 2 (Rome: 2001) 983–1006.

<sup>33</sup> For basic biographical details, see Pignatti F., “Grazzini, Antonfrancesco (detto il Lasca)”, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* vol. 59 (Rome: 2002) 33–40.



('the wet ones') in 1540, he assumed the watery sobriquet 'Il Lasca' ('the roach'). He was a pure *campanilista*, who not only wrote unalloyed Florentine Tuscan, but also chose his native Florence as the unique setting for his stories and poems. It is rumoured that he never left the city, which he called 'generous and most beautiful', not even for a holiday in the hills during the summer heat. Hence his style is sometimes called 'municipal'.<sup>34</sup> He despised the classicizing culture of the upper classes, whose way of life and language were less and less rooted in popular tradition, and praised the burlesque poet Francesco Berni for his 'common and natural language'. Exceptional for his time, he preferred the *commedia dell'arte* to performances of ancient Greek and Roman comedies, which in his view were too intellectual and pretentious.<sup>35</sup> In the last years of his life he devoted most of his time to the Accademia della Crusca (officially founded in 1582), in origin a literary society that oversaw the purity of the Tuscan language. In the late 1540s or the early 1550s, Lasca wrote a burlesque poem "In praise of the statue of St. George by the hand of Donatello at Orsanmichele in Florence" that he dedicated to his old friend Giovambattista della Fonte.<sup>36</sup>

The big surprise of this poem in *terza rima* is that Lasca pretends the *St. George* is his new boyfriend. Now, homosexual encounters and relationships between younger men and boys were a common feature of Florentine life. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the city was deemed a den of sodomy, and on the basis of contemporary police files the American scholar Michael Rocke has calculated that on a total population of 40,000 souls one out of three men under forty were accused of sodomy – many just once, others several times.<sup>37</sup> Yet the most significant aspect of sodomy in Florence was that the partners

<sup>34</sup> Thus Bonino in Grazzini Antonfrancesco, *Opere*, ed. G.D. Bonino (Turin: 1974) 9–10. Lasca's qualification of Florence stems from his preface to *Le cene* ("La introduzione al novellare"), o.c. 447: 'generosa e bellissima città di Firenze'.

<sup>35</sup> Bonino in Grazzini, *Opere* 24, 27, 30.

<sup>36</sup> Grazzini Antonfrancesco, "Capitolo in lode della statua di san Giorgio di mano di Donatello a Orsanmichele in Firenze", in idem, *Le rime burlesche edite e inedite*, ed. C. Verzone (Florence: 1882) 526–529. For Grazzini's friendship with G.B. della Fonte and his younger brother Lionello, see Bramanti V., "Il Lasca e la famiglia Della Fonte," *Schede umanistiche* 20, 1 (2004) 19–40; for the dating of the poem, see ibid. 20–23. Janson, *Sculpture of Donatello* 29 sees the poem as a tribute to the statue's 'vivacità, its "living presence"'.  
<sup>37</sup> Rocke M., *Forbidden Friendships. Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York-Oxford: 1996) 3–4, 115.

were usually men and boys of local origin, seldom foreigners.<sup>38</sup> Even Donatello, it was alleged in several stories that dated from ca. 1480 but were first printed in 1548, had shown a keen interest in beautiful boys.<sup>39</sup> So, by presenting the *St. George* as his boyfriend, the ultra-Florentine Lasca – who as no other was in a position to know these stories – made the statue in a way even more local and indigenous than it was commonly seen.

‘Thank God that I have found a little poet made in a certain manner, who won’t make me live miserably’, Lasca begins the poem (ll. 1–3).<sup>40</sup> The young man doesn’t visit taverns or brothels, and finds no joy in cards or dice (ll. 5–7). This means he won’t be courted by learned liars and other pedants, who think they are a special race (ll. 8–9, 16–18). After this introduction the poet asks if his readers want to know who this guy is, and tells them they can see him this very night, before dusk (ll. 21–23). Then he gives the name and bursts out in praise of the boy (ll. 23–30):

He is the *St. George* that Donatello made;  
now look if you ever saw a face  
so fine, handsome, honest, and beautiful;  
such that every time I set my eyes on him  
I feel so much sweetness and so much joy  
that I feel as if I really were in paradise.<sup>41</sup>

This praise is repeated in slightly different words in the last part of the poem (ll. 89–109), where Lasca once more turns to the ‘handsome limbs so fine and honest’ that none of the boys who ‘play the George’ can rival (ll. 90–93).<sup>42</sup> By extolling the statue’s beauty and enumer-

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 133.

<sup>39</sup> The *poligrafo* Ludovico Domenichi published *Facetie e motti arguti di alcuni eccellentissimi ingegni, et nobilissimi signori* (Florence, Lorenzo Torrentino: 1548) under his own name, yet its core is the so-called *Bel libretto* with ‘detti piacevoli’ by Angelo Poliziano. Janson, *Sculpture of Donatello* 85, using the stories at nrs. 230, 231, and 322 in Wesselski A., *Angelo Polizianos Tagebuch* (Jena: 1929), argues that Donatello was a homosexual; cf. Randolph A.W.B., *Engaging Symbols. Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (New Haven-London: 2002) 166.

<sup>40</sup> Grazzini, *Rime burlesche* 526: ‘Ringraziato sia Dio, ch’io ho trovato / ’n un certo modo fatto un poetino, / che non mi farà viver disperato’. Lines are given in the main text.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 527: ‘Egli è ’l san Giorgio, che fe’ Donatello: / guardate or voi, se mai vedeste un viso / tanto leggiadro, vago, onesto e bello; // tal ch’ogni volta ch’io lo miro fiso, / sento tanta dolcezza e tanta gioia, / che mi par esser proprio in paradiso’.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 528: ‘le vaghe membra leggiadre ed oneste’ (l. 90); ‘questi garzon, che fanno il Giorgio’ (l. 91).

ating the virtues that make *St. George* so special (ll. 64–75) – he is clean, silent, faithful, always good-looking, always in a good mood, never pretending, never nagging – the poet reveals the characteristics of what he believed was typical of catamites of the period.<sup>43</sup>

Lasca presents the *St. George* as an exemplary Florentine boy – a boy as he ought to be: coy, modest, open, but also capable of toughness and masculine behaviour.<sup>44</sup> Such boys are a joy to watch and to dream about; bodily contact is unnecessary. ‘To me it is enough’, Lasca writes (ll. 55–57) ‘that my wishes are satisfied by the eye, more I do not want; let everybody then follow his imagination’.<sup>45</sup> In fact, he enjoins the reader to abstain from bodily love with boys and consume this passion only in the mind. Playful or not, in the end Lasca’s poem is no less moralizing than Doni’s little story. And obviously he thought Donatello’s statue the right vehicle to forward his message.

The third author who published a locally inspired view on the *St. George* was Francesco Bocchi (1548–ca. 1613), whom one of his contemporaries considered the best vernacular prose writer of his time.<sup>46</sup> He was an expert on literature and rhetoric, a good Latinist, a sometime historian, and a passionate lover of the art and architecture of his native city, as evidenced by the guide he published in 1591 under the title *Le bellezze della città di Fiorenza* (*Things of Beauty in the City of Florence*). In 1571, Bocchi, setting out to make a literary career, wrote a lengthy, detailed analysis of Donatello’s statue, which was published in Florence by Giorgio Marescotti in 1584 and in modern times was proclaimed the oldest art historical monograph of a then-already-famous monument. The title page explicitly mentions that the text is *in lingua fiorentina* – a local work of art described and analysed in the

<sup>43</sup> Thus Dall’Orto G., “Anton Francesco Grazzini (detto ‘Il Lasca’, 1503–1584)”, on <http://www.giovanidallorto.com/biografie/grazzini/grazzini.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Randolph, *Engaging Symbols* 178–181 points to the fact that in the fifteenth century Florentine youth fraternities acted out civic ideals in *sacre rappresentazioni* at city pageants, which lent the young male body a certain representational value, and *ibid.* 183–186 discusses Florentine pederasty in the light of homosocial sodality and the production of masculinity (suggesting a *rite de passage* as in antiquity). Although the fraternities were abolished after the death of Savonarola and the fall of the republic, it is quite likely that the socializing aspects of inter-male sexual initiation were still part of daily life in Lasca’s times.

<sup>45</sup> Grazzini, *Rime burlesche* 528: ‘A me sol basta che la voglia mia / s’acqueta nel vedere, nè altro brama: / ognun poi segua la sua fantasia’.

<sup>46</sup> For basic biographical details see De Michelis C., “Bocchi, Francesco”, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* vol. 11 (Rome: 1969) 72–75.

language of its place of origin.<sup>47</sup> Basically, Bocchi's treatise focuses on two points: the artistic climate in Florence that made the creation of such an excellent work of art possible, and at the same time predisposed the Florentines to become art critics and connoisseurs;<sup>48</sup> and the way a work of art such as Donatello's *St. George* could and did influence its observers.

On the first pages of the tract, Bocchi sings the praise of Florence, which in sheer quantity of beautiful works of art surpasses all other cities, and adds that the powers of creation of its artists (in particular Donatello and Michelangelo) are so vigorous that they equal those of the ancient Greeks and Romans, a view he repeats again and again.<sup>49</sup> Of course Bocchi calls Donatello and Michelangelo 'our artist[s]' and he also claims that, like the ancients, the artists of 'our age' are capable of imitating nature to the highest degree.<sup>50</sup> This perceived and emphasized contrast between the fuming creativeness of his own city and its native artists and the for ever lost splendour of Greece and Rome is very similar to the contrast between the living vernacular and the frozen Latin mentioned in the first section of this essay.

In order to discuss the *St. George* in a systematic way, Bocchi established three features that he considered constituent of a work of art: *costume* (character), *vivacità* (liveliness), and *bellezza* (beauty).<sup>51</sup> He maintains that there are very few works of art that show both char-

<sup>47</sup> Bocchi Francesco, *Eccellenza del San Giorgio di Donatello, scultore fiorentino, posta nella facciata di fuori d'Or San Michele*, in Barocchi P. (ed.), *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento tra Manierismo e Controriforma* vol. 3 (Bari: 1962) 125–194. For modern interpretations of Bocchi's treatise, see Barasch M., "Character and physiognomy. Bocchi on Donatello's *St. George*, a Renaissance Text on Expression in Art", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36 (1975) 413–430; Komorowski M., "Donatello's *St. George* in a Sixteenth-Century Commentary by Francesco Bocchi. Some Problems of the Renaissance Theory of Expression in Art", in *Ars auro prior. Studia Ioanni Bialostocki sexagenario dicata* (Warsaw: 1981) 61–66; Schröder G., 'Der kluge Blick.' *Studie zu den kunsttheoretischen Reflexionen Francesco Bocchis* (Hildesheim-Zurich-New York: 2003) 148–254; and idem, "'Ein jeder folge seiner Phantasie.' Zu den Funktionsweisen der Imagination bei der Betrachtung von Kunstwerken im 16. Jahrhundert am Beispiel der Statue des heiligen Georg von Donatello", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 67 (2004) 25–54.

<sup>48</sup> Explicitly in Bocchi, *Eccellenza* 167–168: 'Assai è cosa chiara che che a tanta perfezione gli artifizii sono divenuti, et i giudizi cotanto in simili opere la vista hanno assottigliato, e qui in Firenze particolarmente, che [...] nelle pitture e nelle statue avviene, le quail, tuttoché appariscono singolari, nondimeno elle non prima ne' luoghi pubblici sono collocate, che tantosto le lingue a biasimarle e lacerarle sono preste'.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 131–132; cf. ibid. 147, 149, 151, 167, 175, 179, 187, 191–192.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 145, 166–167 ('nostro/i artefice/i'); 178 ('la nostra età').

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 133. For the sources of Bocchi's features, see Komorowski, "Donatello's *St. George*" 64; Frangenberg T., *Der Betrachter. Studien zur florentinischen Kunstliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: 1990) 124–125; Schröder, 'Der kluge Blick' 148–153.

acter and liveliness, and claims that Donatello's statue is an exception to the rule.<sup>52</sup> By means of the three features, a work of art influences the mind of the observer. The *St. George*, for instance, 'moves by its liveliness, creates good ideas by its character, delights by its beauty, and by all three infuses the observer with high and heroic virtue, that in this statue is assimilated in a most happy way.'<sup>53</sup> In Bocchi's view, liveliness was a combination of naturalistic portrayal and the suggestion of movement and action.<sup>54</sup> It was what one might call the 'living presence' of the statue. Character, on the other hand, was the *ēthos*, the mental *virtù* that was typical of the figure – in *St. George*'s case that of 'a true champion of Christ'.<sup>55</sup> A beautiful, lively, and ethical figure such as this statue influences the people that look at it in the same way that any living being with similar qualities would. *St. George* shows himself not as some work of art, but as nature itself, not as a human invention, but a divine one, nor as a marble statue, but as a living being that acts with vivacity. The legs are moving, the arms are ready, the head is attentive; the whole person is in action, and the ways and forms of his actions by means of the character present to our eyes a valorous and invincible and magnanimous spirit.<sup>56</sup>

In Bocchi's analysis of the sculpture's effect, beauty plays only a minor, auxiliary role; his main interest is invested in vivacity and character. These two features are essential in making a work of art into a figure capable of persuading the viewers to take it as an example and fashion their own lives after this role model. That is exactly what public

<sup>52</sup> Bocchi, *Eccellenza* 163.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 192–193: 'muove con la vivacità, crea gentili pensieri col costume, diletta con la bellezza, e con tutte e tre queste cose infonde in chi mira alta virtù et eroica, che in questa statua felicemente è fabbricata'.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 153, 157–158.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 186: 'un vero campione di Cristo'.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 164: 'San Giorgio, il quale non come qualche artificio, ma come la natura stessa, non come umana invenzione, ma divina, né come statua marmorea, ma come cosa viva e che con vivacità adoperi si dimostra. Muovonsi le gambe, le braccia son preste, la testa è pronta, la persona tutta adopera, e le maniere e gli atti dell'adoperare per virtù del costume uno animo valoroso et invitto e magnanimo inanzi agli occhi ci presentano'. Cf. Bocchi Francesco, *Le bellezze della città di Fiorenza* (Florence, [Bartolomeo Sermartelli il vecchio]: 1591) 30–31: 'San Giorgio è tenuto pari alle più rare sculture di Roma e per l'eccessiva vivacità avvisano gli uomini intendenti, che le avanzi. E' famosissima questa figura, e fa tremar di maraviglia, e star pensosi i più svegliati ingegni, ed i migliori artefici, come quasi nel marmo sia il moto, e lo spirito, e adoperi quello, per cui dal pregiato artefice primamente è stata informata. In versi, e 'n prosa a ragione da molti è stata celebrata: e non ha molto, che con disteso trattato è uscita fuori stampata così gran lode, quale così sovrano artificio a tutti pare, che sia dicevole'.

art ought to do: 'what would be better and more worthy of imitation for statues to show', he asks, 'than the spirit and the ideas, and make us in one single glance see almost the entire life as it ought to be lived?'<sup>57</sup> To Bocchi's mind, art, in particular public art, had to be edifying; it had to contribute to making the members of society better citizens. It is the commonwealth, the *bene comune*, that was to profit by this kind of persuasive art. And because works of art such as the *St. George* played a part in shaping the morals and manners of society, government took an active interest in them, 'valu[ing] figures that arouse in anybody's mind sound and chaste thoughts and conversely tak[ing] away those that produce lascivious behaviour and licentiousness.'<sup>58</sup> Apart from *St. George's* being a joy for the eyes, Bocchi treats the statue in the first place as a bearer of morals. And he insists that the figure was so effective precisely because it looked so living, so human – and between the lines: so very much a Florentine.

#### IV

Can one explain why Doni, Lasca, and Bocchi chose the *St. George* as the bearer of their moral messages? And why, literary men as they were, did they sing his praise in the local dialect?

To begin with the second question: in the second half of the sixteenth century, it was common practice to write in Italian when treating literary or artistic matter. Moreover, it is imaginable that an author, even when a good Latinist, preferred to write in his own tongue for the ease of expression it offered. Whereas literary Latin more often

<sup>57</sup> Bocchi, *Eccellenza* 144: 'qual cosa maggiore e più mirabile...possono le statue dimostrare, che l'animo et i pensieri, et in una sola vista sola vista la vita tutta, che si dee vivere, farci vedere?'

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 176–177: 'E perché questo fine dee generare costumi in pro' del genere umano, per ciò il governo civile ne prende cura partitamente [quote from here] et apprezza le figure che destano negli animi altrui santi pensieri e casti, et all'incontro toglie via quelle che fanno sovvenire lascivie e scostumatezze'. Schröder, "Ein jeder folge seiner Phantasie" 31–32 points to the similarities between Bocchi, who saw Donatello's *St. George* as an example for aristocratic youths because of its manner (*costume*), and Monsignor Giovanni della Casa's *Galathea* (written between 1551 and 1555, but first published as a separate treatise in 1559, three years after his death), which bore the subtitle "ovvero dei costumi". Where according to Della Casa *costumi* meant that good manners would, by their being copied, eventually result in moral improvement, according to Bocchi the ethical radiance (*costume*) of Donatello's statue made its imitation by young people possible and improvement probable.

than not was Ciceronian and hence an example of intricate, *recherchée* phrasing, the vernacular was open to new meanings and forms, which made its use very flexible – no mean artistic bonus! Another advantage of writing in the vernacular was that it sensibly increased the Italian audience of a text. Also, it could contribute to fomenting local chauvinism and, on a more sophisticated level, be instrumental in creating cultural cohesion.

As to the choice for the *St. George*, a passage from Pietro Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua* is illuminating. Bembo writes that he was not so sure one should choose a linguistic form or style and keep to it forever, for language and stories do not stay in the same state, as one can see very clearly in every region and in every people; what is more, they change a little or a lot, much like fashion, and warfare, and other manners and ways of life, whatever they are. For that reason, writings, exactly like clothes and weapons, have to adapt themselves to the customs of the times in which they are written, because they have to be read and understood by the people that live, not by those who are already gone.<sup>59</sup>

Now one might object that the style of clothes and weapons sported by *St. George* in the 1550s were out of fashion for nearly a century and a half, yet to the period Florentine eye the outfit and bearing of the statue seem to have been far more in keeping with the time than the naked *all'antico* marbles and bronzes preferred by the Medicean elite.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the statue was part of the cityscape, open to view at any time of the day, and – *pace* Doni – installed on a rather conspicuous, venerated, and much-visited place. Presumably every Florentine had seen the *St. George* many times during his or her lifetime, and given that the statue 'has always been judged more worthy of praise and more valuable than other ones', it probably had iconic value.<sup>61</sup> It was felt to be indigenous – vernacular, so to say.

<sup>59</sup> Bembo, *Prose e rime* 115–116: Perciò che, come si vede chiaramente in ogni regione e in ogni popolo avvenire, il parlare e le favelle non sempre durano in uno medesimo stato, anzi elle si vanno o poco o molto cangiando, sì come si cangia il vestire, il guerreggiare, e gli altri costumi e maniere del vivere, come che sia. Perché le scritture, sì come anco le veste e le armi, accostare si debbono e adagiare con l'uso de' tempi, ne' quali si scrive, con ciò sia cosa che esse dagli uomini, che vivono, hanno ad esser lette e intese, e non da quelli che son già passati' (*Volgar lingua* 1.27).

<sup>60</sup> Janson, *Sculpture of Donatello* 29 suggests that the closest models for *St. George's* costume (and armour) are Ghiberti's panels for the north doors of the Florence Baptistery.

<sup>61</sup> Bocchi, *Eccellenza* 128 (from the dedication to the Accademia Fiorentina del Disegno from 1584): 'è stata giudicata sempre più delle altre degna di lode e di pregio'.

In Bocchi's case yet another mechanism can be observed. As a post-Vasarian, he was educated not only with the cultural maxim that the ancients were the measure of all art, but also with a continually expanding supply of archaeological drawings and scholarly descriptions of Roman remains. In order to praise a local statue that was certainly of classical inspiration but definitely unclassical in form, he sought to upgrade it by describing it along criteria thought to be typical of ancient statues. His statements imply that the *St. George* was equal to, and even exceeded, ancient sculpture. In doing so, Bocchi achieved something similar to what Filarete, Raphael, and Vasari had done with ancient architecture: drawing an object that was 'foreign' in time, style, and fashion into the orbit of local notions of what was indigenous by declaring it 'ours'.<sup>62</sup>

Doni, Lasca, and Bocchi were Florentine authors who cared for their Tuscan dialect, the use of which they cultivated and tried to preserve and to further. Also, they adhered to traditional civic notions and popular culture. In their texts on Donatello's *St. George*, they went local, using this well-known statue as a vehicle for their views, which were decidedly local as well. Doni prefers *St. George*'s traditional Florentine looks and manner to the contorted classicist nudes Cosimo I commissioned. Lasca treats the slender, heroic figure as one of 'our' boys, with whom a Florentine man could fall in love – a remarkable choice, given the preference for male nudes expressed by boy lovers of the time. Bocchi in his analysis ingeniously equates classical beauty and local values. He claims that this local, and to the period eye rather old-fashioned, statue represented ancient (by which he implies typical Florentine) beauty and virtues, and urges his readers to take *St. George* as their moral guide. The authors make the originally avant-garde statue into a model of local values and old-fashioned political views, and at the same time into an example of a native style as opposed to newfangled Ducal classicism. To all effects, the *St. George* was vernacularized – made into a local idol by high praise in local language.

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<sup>62</sup> For the intellectual appropriation of ancient art as the immediate source of contemporary art in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see Barkan L., *Unearthing the Past. Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven-London: 1999), in particular 109–117.



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AS MANY LANDS, AS MANY CUSTOMS.  
VERNACULAR SELF-AWARENESS AMONG THE  
NETHERLANDISH RHETORICIANS

Bart Ramakers

*Introduction*

The awareness of belonging to or taking part in a local, native, Netherlandish literary culture supposes that early modern authors, their readers, and, where it concerns drama, also their spectators, experienced that culture as separate from a non-local, foreign, or at least non-native – Latin, Italian or French – literary tradition. The study of sixteenth-century Dutch literature is still to a large degree dominated by the question of how it related to the literature of these other languages. In accordance with the triad *translatio-imitatio-emulatio*, a chronological development is construed whereby the vernacular literature – by translating, imitating, and rivaling – modeled itself after and then emancipated itself from Latin, French, and Italian examples. This process is not value-free: for some of the contemporary authors (and, following them, for many literary historians) the ambition and the ability to graft vernacular literature onto literature in other languages formed (and forms) the criterion for good, or otherwise true, modern, or learned authorship.

This contribution demonstrates, on the basis of four case studies from the mid-sixteenth to the second decade of the seventeenth century, how the rhetoricians, the practitioners of sixteenth-century Dutch vernacular literature, were aware early on of the individuality and antiquity of their literary means and customs, and in the course of the sixteenth century positioned themselves against non-native traditions in a complex process of attracting and rejecting. Their vernacular self-awareness developed as a result of the confrontation with classical texts and with foreign literature in which the classics had already left their trace. Instead of a gradual decline of rhetoricians' literature – the conclusion reached by the paradigm described above – the study of this process yields rather the image of an alternative, vital literary culture, strongly aimed at the preservation of traditional means and customs, not out of incompetence or conservatism, but out of

pragmatism and idealism. It offered the best guarantee for reaching a series of artistic goals that the rhetoricians connected to their literary practice. Remarkably, they succeeded in presenting and continuing this practice, traditional though it was, as essentially modern and in concord with classical principles.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the rhetoricians did not answer to the ideal-typical development of vernacular Renaissance literature (or only partially did so). Still we can certainly call their literary practice modern. The artistic goals of the rhetoricians prove to connect well with the humanistic ideas and ideals relating to language and literature that took root in the sixteenth century. The cases discussed here concern texts of a poetical nature that shed light on these ideas and ideals. The reason for discussing them within the scope of this volume is that art historians, in order to ascertain the nature and individuality of sixteenth-century Netherlandish art, have searched for parallels with contemporary vernacular literature, but were confronted with the absence of scholarly literature that explicitly and adequately studies this relation from a literary-historical perspective.

This essay attempts to fill the lacuna, benefiting from art-historical research into the relation between both art and literature, in particular regarding vernacularism. In that research, the connections between sixteenth-century Netherlandish literature and art on the one hand, and the poetical and art-theoretical notions from classical antiquity on the other, are discussed at length. In the analysis of the rhetoricians' way of thinking about the relation between the 'native' and the 'other', the terms *ars* and *ingenium* will play an important role. They more or less dominate the discussion of the four cases and are therefore treated beforehand in a separate section. While literary-historical research interprets them as contrasting concepts, art-historical research suggests they are complementary. Therefore, the literary-historical research is treated here first. It wrongly assumes the existence in the sixteenth century of a dichotomy between what is called a musical-

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis has been discussed in a different context in: Ramakers B.A.M., "Bruegel en de rederijkers. Literatuur en schilderkunst in de zestiende eeuw", in Jong J.J. et al. (eds.), *Pieter Bruegel, Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 47 (1996) (Zwolle: 1997) 81–105, esp. 97–102; Ramakers B., "Tonen en betogen. De dramaturgie van de Rotterdamse spelen van 1561", in Duits H. – Strien T. van (eds.), *De rhetorijcke in vele manieren'. Lezingen bij het afscheid van Marijke Spies als Hoogleraar Oudere Nederlandse Letterkunde aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam*, special issue *Spiegel der Letteren* 43, 3 (2001) 176–204, esp. 179–181.

poetic and a rhetorical-argumentative notion of literature. Next, the relation between art and literature is discussed and the step is made towards the twin concepts of *ars* and *ingenium*. From there the four case studies will be presented.

### *An Untenable Dichotomy*

The notion seems to be set in stone that it was not until the end of the sixteenth century and in the Northern Netherlands that vernacular literature answered to the humanistic ideals of the Renaissance: poetry and theatre after the classical model, based on erudition, written in pure Dutch, and permeated by an awareness of national individuality.<sup>2</sup> After Apollo and the Muses first visited the ancient Greek and Latin authors, it was not until the end of the Middle Ages in Italy with Petrarch and not until the sixteenth century in France with the poets

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<sup>2</sup> The summary in this paragraph is based on: Bostoen K., *Dichterschap en koopmanschap in de zestiende eeuw. Omtrent de dichters Guillaume de Poitou en Jan van der Noot* (Deventer: 1987) 29–37; Bostoen K., “Nation und Literatur in den Niederlanden der Frühen Neuzeit”, in Garber K. (ed.), *Nation und Literatur im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit. Akten des I. Internationalen Osnabrücker Kongresses zur Kulturgeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen: 1989) 554–575, esp. 559–561; Ingen F. van, “Die niederländische Nationalliteratur im Kontext der konfessionspolitischen Auseinandersetzungen auf der Wende vom 16. zum 17. Jahrhundert”, in Garber K. (ed.), *Nation und Literatur im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit. Akten des I. Internationalen Osnabrücker Kongresses zur Kulturgeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen: 1989) 576–594, esp. 576–582; Koppenol J., “Een tegendraadse poëtica. De literaire ideeën van Jan van Hout”, in Bostoen K.J.S. – Gabriëls S. – Koppenol J. (eds.), [Jan van Hout,] *Voorrede tot het gezelschap. Voorrede bij zijn vertaling van Buchanan's Franciscanus* (Soest: 1993) 3–26, esp. 7–11, 18–19; Koppenol J., “Maatwerk: poëtiëk, metriëk en muziëk bij Jan van Hout”, in Fleurkens A.C.G. – Korpel L.G. – Meerhoff K. (eds.), *Dans der muzen. De relatie tussen de kunsten gethematiseerd* (Hilversum: 1995) 57–72, esp. 59–61; Koppenol J., *Leids heelal. Het Loterijspel (1596) van Jan van Hout* (Hilversum: 1998) 151–152, 155; Spies M., “‘Poeetsche fabriëken’ en andere allegorieën, eind 16de–begin 17de eeuw”, *Oud Holland* 105, 4 (1991) 228–243, esp. 228–233, 237–241; Spies M., ‘Hier is gheen Helicon...’ *Het rederijker perspectief van de zeventiende-eeuwse literatuur*, inaugural lecture VU University Amsterdam (1995); Spies M., “Developments in Sixteenth-Century Dutch Poetics: from ‘Rhetoric’ to ‘Renaissance’”, in Spies M., *Rhetoric, Rhetoricians and Poets. Studies in Renaissance Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Duits H. – Strien T. van (Amsterdam: 1999) 37–50; Moser N., *De strijd voor rhetorica. Poëtica en positie van rederijkers in Vlaanderen, Brabant, Zeeland en Holland tussen 1450 en 1620* (Amsterdam: 2001) 11–14. The most recent overview of early modern literary history also represents in general the vision sketched in this paragraph: Porteman K. – Smits-Veldt M.B., *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1560–1700* (Amsterdam: 2009).

of the Pléiade that vernacular poetry too would be inspired by them. It was at long last in the cities of the province of Holland, through authors such as Dirk Volckertsz. Coornhert (1522–1590) from Haarlem, Jan van Hout (1542–1609) from Leiden, and Hendrik Laurensz. Spiegel (1549–1612) from Amsterdam, that a literature along classical lines is said to have flourished in the Netherlands as well. Through its activities towards purification and construction of the Dutch language on the one hand and its attention to formal and conceptual improvement of Dutch literature on the other, the Amsterdam chamber of rhetoric De Eglentier (The Eglantine) in particular is said to have laid the foundation for the canon of Renaissance literature, with Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft (1581–1647) and Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679) as high points. This view was promoted by Spiegel and others, and afterwards was adopted by seventeenth-century authors, thus entering written literary history. Its popularity was, especially from a Northern perspective, connected with the possibility it offered to identify the history of literature in Dutch with that of the Dutch Republic, which had just during this period gained its independence from Spain.

In this view, there are winners and losers, so to speak. The ‘winners’ are the above-mentioned Northern Netherlandish authors, the ‘losers’ their Southern Netherlandish colleagues who around the middle of the sixteenth century were the first to attempt to put Dutch literature on track with that from antiquity and started to reflect on their position with respect to Latin and other non-native literary traditions. In essence, this view concerns poets who wrote poetry and plays within the framework of the numerous chambers of rhetoric (and later more loosely associated with the chambers), which until the beginning of the seventeenth century ruled the literary landscape of the Low Countries. As emigrants who came to the North most often for religious reasons, several among them are supposed to have played a considerable, but not dominating, role in the development of Dutch literature.

Those Southern Netherlandish authors of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century are said to have been for the most part adherents of what is called a musical-poetic (or harmonic-fictional) notion of poetry. They were, so it seems, primarily concerned with the musical, harmonic, and emotionalising effects of literature, whereby they drew from classical themes, images, and motifs – called *poëtrie* – and believed themselves to be divinely inspired. It regards a notion of poetry that, when it comes to vernacular literature, goes back to the fifteenth-century French ‘Grands Rhétoriciens’. The first poet

who, with reference to these French origins, made mention of it in Dutch, was the rhetorician Matthijs de Castelein (c. 1485–1550), in the first (and only) rhetoricians' poetics, *De Const van Rhetoriken* (1555). In addition, we come across references to it in a few plays performed during the famous Antwerp *Landjuweel* of 1561, a rhetoricians' contest where the status of the liberal arts was a point of reflection and, in some plays, also the position of the art of painting.

In connection to the *Landjuweel* the names of the Antwerp rhetoricians Willem van Haecht (c. 1530–1612) and Cornelis van Ghistele (c. 1510–c. 1573) are always mentioned. Van Haecht was the *factor* (principal poet) of De Violieren (The Stock-Gillyflowers) and organiser of the feast. In his welcome play, which opens the printed collection of plays and other written contributions to the competition, Antwerp is compared to the Parnassus, and it is hoped that soon a Netherlandish Petrarch or Ronsard may be welcomed. Before that, in his description of the festive entry of all participating chambers of rhetoric, Van Haecht had already emphasised the antiquity of Dutch poetry and literary rhetoric – both are mentioned in the same breath. In order to make clear that this Dutch literary tradition is not an invented tradition, Van Haecht refers to chronicles that mention the interference of some Burgundian dukes with the rhetoricians and of Duke Jan IV of Brabant (1403–1427), who at the beginning of the fifteenth century was involved in the foundation of the oldest chamber of rhetoric, Het Boeck (The Book), in Brussels.<sup>3</sup>

Van Ghistele, the *factor* of the other Antwerp chamber, De Goudbloem (The Marigold), had already built a reputation as a populariser of the classics with translations of, amongst others, the comedies of Terence.<sup>4</sup> He was, together with the author of the play of the chamber of Herentals,<sup>5</sup> the only rhetorician who made a clear distinction between rhetoric and poetry, and defined the latter as a form of music

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the age of this chamber, see Coigneau D., “‘Den Boeck’ van Brussel: een geval apart?”, *Jaarboek Koninklijke Soevereine Hoofdkamer “De Fonteyne” te Gent* 49–50 (1999–2000) 31–44.

<sup>4</sup> Vinck-Van Caekenberghe M., *Een onderzoek naar het leven, het werk en de literaire opvattingen van Cornelis van Ghistele (1510/11–1573), rederijker en humanist* (Ghent: 1996).

<sup>5</sup> *Spelen van sinne vol scoone moralisacien [...] op die Questie Wat den mensch aldermeest tot conste verweert* (Antwerp: Willem Silvius, 1562), fol. C1<sup>v</sup>.

that originated in divine inspiration.<sup>6</sup> Like Van Haecht, Van Ghistele had knowledge of poetical distinctions from antiquity and was – as we know from research into his translations – familiar with the ideas of the Pléiade.<sup>7</sup>

Lucas de Heere (1534–1584) and Jan van der Noot (c. 1539–after 1595) are also authors who contemplated the position of rhetoricians' literature with regard to classical and non-native literary traditions. Where De Heere still entered, in *Den Hof en Boomgaerd der Poë sien*, examples of native genres as the refrain, in addition to pieces of classical and foreign types of poetry (epigrams and sonnets, to name just two), Van der Noot, in *Het bosken*, stuck to sonnets exclusively. And whereas De Heere's French example was Clément Marot (1496–1544), who did not belong to the Pléiade and still had one foot in the Middle Ages, Van der Noot followed in the footsteps of Pierre de Ronsard (1524–1585), Jean-Antoine de Baïf (1532–1589), and Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374), who are reputed to be true Renaissance poets. Thus, Van der Noot appears to have been the man who answered Van Haecht's hope for a Netherlandish Petrarch or Ronsard.

With the publication of *Het bosken* (and Van der Noot's other work), the musical-poetic approach definitively penetrated Dutch literature. His torch was taken up by a group of mainly Southern Netherlandish poets who settled in the province of Holland in the late sixteenth century, under the leadership of Karel van Mander (1548–1606), who was a painter and a poet just as De Heere was – and, incidentally, De Heere's apprentice in painting. At his initiative, *Den Nederduytschen Helicon* came into being, published posthumously in 1610, in which a multitude of autochthon and immigrant poets living in the province of Holland presented a sample of the poetic taste of that moment. Literary historians point out that the Southern Netherlanders expressed their poetical orientation in the titles and in the prefaces of their publications by referring to the Helicon, the poets' mountain, where Apollo and the Muses stayed. (The Roman poets considered another mountain

<sup>6</sup> *Spelen van Sinne*, fol. Q2<sup>r-v</sup>. For a comprehensive conceptual analysis of the plays of the Antwerp Landjuweel, see Vandommele J.J.M., *Als in een spiegel. Vrede, kennis en gemeenschap op het Antwerpse Landjuweel van 1561* (Hilversum: 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Hemelaar F., "Translating the Art of Terence. Sixteenth-Century Versions of the Characters of 'Eunuchus'", in Meier C. – Ramakers B. – Beyer H. (eds.), *Akteure und Aktionen, Figuren und Handlungstypen im Drama der Frühen Neuzeit, Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme; Schriftenreihe des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496 23* (Münster: 2008) 127–156.



in Greece, the Parnassus, as the Muses' home; the terms *Helicon* and *Parnassus* were used interchangeably.) This mountain was, as it were, moved to the Low Countries, now that poetry was inspired by the classics there too. *Den Nederduytschen Helicon* is an example of one such publication. Another is the printed collection of contributions to the last large rhetoricians' competition to be held in Holland (in Vlaardingen), untitled *Vlaerdings Redenrijck-bergh* (1616).

Characteristic of all these poets, from the authors of *De Const van Rhetoriken* to *Vlaerdings Redenrijck-bergh*, is that besides their professed and practised orientation towards classical and foreign literatures, they stayed loyal to native literary customs, by continuing to observe traditional genres, modifying these after non-native examples, or presenting them as equivalents thereof. They persisted, to formulate it negatively, in clinging to the old rather than liberating themselves from it.

Against the Southern Netherlandish tradition was the Northern Netherlandish, with Coornhert, Spiegel, and Van Hout as pioneers. Spiegel, in his didactic poem *Hert-spiegel* (published in 1614, but written around the turn of the century), declared himself in favour of Dutch poetry without Greek and Latin eruditions. He turned against the use of classical mythology in Dutch poetry and against foreign influence in general, not only where it concerned literary form and content, but also linguistic usage. In his introductory letter ('Toe-eyghenbrief') to the *Twe-spraak vande Nederduitsche letterkunst* (1584), the grammar book written by Spiegel and published by De Eglentier, he wrote that 'our common Dutch language is an unmixed [pure], rich, elegant, and rational language'.<sup>8</sup> It certainly did not need all this 'pomp' ('pronk'). Coornhert was of the same opinion. In the introduction to his *Come-die van lief en leedt* (1567), he had already repudiated all mythological decorativeness and gaudiness, splendour of words and artful strophe forms, but also the use of metrical rules that restricted the poet's freedom. Under the influence of humanist rhetoric the authors in question started to place more value on expressiveness and convincing argumentation and less on beauty of sound and on imagination. In short, they had a rhetorical-argumentative view on poetry.

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<sup>8</sup> *Twe-spraak vande Nederduitsche letterkunst* (1584), ed. Dibbets G.R.W., *Studia Theodisca* 17 (Assen-Maastricht: 1985) 53: 'onze alghemene Duytsche taal een onvermengde, ryke, cierlyke ende verstandelycke spraack is'.

Among the Northern Netherlanders, however, Jan van Hout was an advocate of the musical-poetic school of thought, including the use of classical meter. He expressly separated poetry from rhetoric; poetry was not only older, but also nobler and less dangerous than rhetoric. After all, to rhetoric clung the objection (already expressed by Plato) of falsehood and deception. Rhetoric was human work, while poetry was divine, as it rested on inspiration from above. This is why Van Hout considered writing poetry as an elite affair as well. Its practice and assessment was a matter for experts, especially scholars, of whom he knew many in his hometown of Leiden. Van Hout and, following him, Daniël Heinsius (1580–1655) serve as models for a literary practice on a classicistic basis.

It fitted the intentions of the adherents of both schools of thought to claim that, with regard to literary practice, in most chambers of rhetoric it was just sorrow and misery. If one was oriented rhetorical-argumentatively, one expressed ones aversion to the use by the rhetoricians of classical imagery and their excessive employment of fine words and complicated rhyme forms. If, on the other hand, one was dedicated to the musical-poetic school of thought, one held against them a lack of knowledge with regard to classical forms and themes and an incompetence to adequately apply them after the example of classical and foreign poets. In both cases, it was thought that the linguistic prowess of the rhetoricians, their ability to write pure Dutch, was insufficient. Incidentally, it appears that the tension between both schools of thought was felt too among the rhetoricians themselves. During refrain competitions in Rotterdam in 1599 and in Schiedam in 1603 the primacy of rhetoric and that of poetry, respectively, was defended.<sup>9</sup>

It appears that the development of a vernacular self-awareness was furthered by the rise of these two schools of thought – and by the tensions between them. Regardless of whether one oriented oneself on classical literature (the musical-poetic position) or distanced oneself from it (the rhetorical-argumentative stance), the need to stimulate literature in the vernacular tongue played an important role. This has been stressed time and again by literary historians. As a consequence, the awareness of the individuality of Dutch literature is at present

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<sup>9</sup> Moser N., “Succes in de marge. Rederijkers in Kethel aan het begin van de 17<sup>e</sup> eeuw”, *Holland* 29, 4/5 (1997) 209–225.

especially attributed to those authors who presented themselves as pronounced representatives of one of both positions, especially in Holland at the end of the sixteenth century. It is also obvious that, for the benefit of characterising the distinctive features of these positions, the rhetoricians were dismissed as authors who were in the way of the development, purification, and advancement of Dutch language and literature. For example, in his often consulted study Lode van den Branden employs the call for and the actual purification of the Dutch language from loan and bastard words as a criterion for vernacular self-awareness. He considers this consciousness, in relation to literature, to be best developed in late sixteenth-century Holland, the cultural heartland of the Northern Netherlands.<sup>10</sup>

The reproach of an excessive use of fine words, especially when these were derived from the foreign, appears to have particularly affected chambers with members of Southern Netherlandish descent. It would fit their musical-poetic view to embellish their texts in this manner. The impression exists that their Northern Netherlandish (especially Amsterdam) colleagues did this a lot less frequently. The possibilities for expression of the Dutch language were exploited in such a way that one could even speak of 'realism'. In that respect, their work would point ahead to that of another early seventeenth-century Renaissance author from Amsterdam, Gerbrand Adriaensz. Bredero (1585–1618), and even, to draw a parallel with the visual arts, to genre painting of the seventeenth century.

### *Art and Literature*

How did poetry actually relate to the art of painting of that time? This question is relevant, as a comparison between literature and the visual arts of the sixteenth century brings to light the untenability of the dichotomy sketched above, and ought to lead to a repositioning of the rhetoricians' literature in poetical terms. In recent art-historical studies, the question has been raised (not for the first time, but certainly with greater epistemological urgency than before) what attitudes Dutch painters adopted in this period to the antique and Italian traditions on

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<sup>10</sup> Branden L. van den, *Het streven naar verheerlijking, zuivering en opbouw van het Nederlands in de 16e eeuw* (Ghent: 1956) 78, 184, 187, 204, 301.

the one hand and to the native Dutch tradition, rooted in the work of the 'Flemish Primitives', on the other.<sup>11</sup> In this regard, we mainly speak of the Southern Netherlands, as it was in Flanders and Brabant – especially in Antwerp – where the heart of sixteenth-century art production was, even more so where the incorporation of classical forms was concerned. With regard to the latter, it is stressed that the art of painting did not just rest on pure passion for copying or epigonism, but was the result of a complex process of adaptation, in which old and new, familiar and foreign, were deliberately combined. To be sure, this yielded hybrid art, but not in the meaning of impure.<sup>12</sup> The artists in question intended to harmonise different traditions with regard to time and origins, incidentally without disguising their diversity, or, if one prefers, their contradiction. On the contrary, the more or less recognisable hybridisation of subjects, styles, and iconographies served the expression of a regional, cultural, and historical self-awareness. Through their work, the artists wanted to initiate a discourse on the individuality of Netherlandish art, but also on the art of painting as an artistic discipline and on the artist as a practitioner thereof.

It is especially the work of Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1520–1569) that draws the attention in this context. Different from what has always been assumed, his style cannot be called exclusively vernacular. It did not carry a condemnation either of the contemporaneous Romanism, that is, the orientation on the classically inspired art from Italy. On the contrary, Bruegel tried to integrate classical and Italian elements in the native visual tradition. In his work, he, more than other painters, brought up for discussion via his artwork non-native ways of painting and emphasised the possibilities of the vernacular style, in which the rhetorical principles of *copia* (abundance), *aptum* (suitability), and *ornatus* (embellishment) could be realised just as well – if not better. Some of Bruegel's paintings are even said to have incited conversations about the nature and effects of art and about the relation between

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<sup>11</sup> Richardson T.M., *Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Art Discourse in the Sixteenth-Century Netherlands* (Aldershot-Burlington, VT: 2011); Weissert C., 'Die kunstreichste Kunst der Künste'. *Niederländische Malerei im 16. Jahrhundert* (Munich: 2011). Only these two studies are mentioned, as they more emphatically and comprehensively than any preceding studies discuss the individuality of (Southern) Netherlandish painting of the sixteenth century in relation to the vernacular literature of the rhetoricians.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the concept of hybridity, see Burke P., *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge-Malden, MA: 2009).

native and non-native artistic traditions in a very concrete, humanistic context: that of the *convivium*.

To illustrate and explicate the nature and function of the sixteenth-century art of painting, Todd Richardson and Caecilie Weissert point to parallel developments in vernacular literature.<sup>13</sup> Therein the native tradition was, after all, confronted with non-native traditions as well. By first improving Dutch language – that is the body of dialects then called *Duyts(ch)* – after the example of classical Latin (following what happened to Italian and French), and subsequently imitating within it genres, themes, and motifs originating from classical and foreign traditions, Dutch literature could rival that of antiquity and eventually even surpass it. For the poetical body of thought behind this renewal, the ideas of the French Pléiade movement are pointed to, with Joachim du Bellay (c. 1522–1560) and Ronsard as its most important representatives.

When one searches for identical views within the Dutch-speaking regions, one soon arrives at the rhetoricians. Especially when one looks for similarities with the visual arts it is natural to consult texts that originate from their circle. After all, in this period they dominated literary life and practised poetry and drama in close relation to visual artists. We know several examples of rhetoricians who were also painters; of rhetoricians who were friends with painters; of rhetoricians who worked together with painters in the realisation of public feasts, theatrical performances, and ceremonial entries; and of rhetoricians who belonged to the same cultural sphere, as for instance the Antwerp chamber *De Violieren*, which formed a subsection of the painters' guild, *St. Luke*. The comparison with rhetoricians' literature pushes forward especially for the visual arts in the Southern Netherlands, particularly in mid-sixteenth-century Antwerp, where the vernacular self-awareness among artists would manifest itself most evidently.<sup>14</sup>

For the self-conscious blending of native and non-native traditions by Southern Netherlandish painters in general and by Bruegel in particular, a parallel situation in contemporaneous literature does indeed exist. But to date it has hardly been recognised as such by literary

<sup>13</sup> Richardson T.M., *Pieter Bruegel the Elder*; Weissert C., 'Die kunstreichste Kunst der Künste'.

<sup>14</sup> In this context, see Ramakers B. (ed.), *Understanding Art in Antwerp. Classicising the Popular, Popularising the Classic (c. 1540–1580)*, *Groningen Studies in Cultural Change* (Leuven: 2011).

historians, let alone given enough recognition, in the sense that the blending or combination of traditional vernacular and new foreign forms (or more than that: the presenting of native literary culture as fully equivalent or complementary to the Latin one – just as old, learned, and effective) is evaluated as an individual manifestation of the literary Renaissance. This blending of vernacular and foreign forms was well founded, both intellectually and artistically, and cannot be written off as an evolutionary phase in the direction of a complete classicistic literature, within which, besides the purified vernacular itself, hardly a trace of the medieval or sixteenth-century literary tradition can be detected.

That we are not dealing with an in-between phase is already apparent from the fact that the rhetoricians until into the second decade of the seventeenth century held on to traditional forms of literary practice, both to existing organisational forms of literary life (that is, the chambers and their competitions) and to passed down literary genres and rules (that is, the allegorical *spel van sinne*,<sup>15</sup> the refrain, and the so-called free Dutch meter, in which only the number of stressed syllables was fixed, not the number of feet and the meter). But these traditional forms were combined with classical genres and themes, with sonnets, metrical feet, ordering into acts, and of course with classical subject matters, both mythological and historical. This position was first made explicit – it had already existed implicitly much longer – by the aforementioned Mattheijs de Castelein in *De Const van Rhetoriken*. It was last elaborately put into words by Job van de Wael (d. after 1630) in his welcome play for the final great rhetoricians' competition to be held in Holland, that of 1616 in Vlaardingen. The play, together with all other contributions to the competition, was collected under the title *Vlaerdings Redenrijck-bergh*.

These two texts, which will be analysed below, show that there was certainly no question of a sharp distinction between a musical-poetic and a rhetorical-argumentative movement in the sixteenth century. The authors – for the most part poets operating more or less closely to a chamber of rhetoric – considered themselves not only inspired by Apollo, the god of poetry, but also shaped by Mercury, the god of

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<sup>15</sup> About this genre, see Ramakers, B., "Dutch Allegorical Theatre. Traditions and Conceptual Approach", in Happé P. – Strietman E. (eds.), *Urban Theatre in the Low Countries 1400–1625, Medieval Texts and Contexts of Northern Europe* 12 (Turnhout: 2006) 127–147.

rhetoric. The old forms of theatre and poetry they practised had in their eyes always been both musical and rhetorical, poetic and argumentative. The Renaissance provided extra images and arguments for this connection, for instance the image of the Helicon, where not only Apollo, but also Mercury could be found. The presence of them both is explicitly referred to in *De Const van Rhetoriken* as well as in *Vlaerdings Redenrijck-bergh*. New arguments for the notion that poetry was a form of rhetoric were provided by the rediscovered and intensively consulted writings of Cicero and Quintilian. Lucas de Heere too, in his *Den Hof en Boomgaerd der Poësien*, and the contributors to *Den Nederduytschen Helicon*, who are regarded respectively as pioneer and adherents of the musical-poetic approach, upon closer examination prove never to have broken the bond between rhetoric and poetry.

### *Ars and Ingenium*

Just as painters discussed their art, the authors in question were involved in a discourse on the individuality of Dutch literature, on literature as an artistic discipline, and on the poet as practitioner thereof. Above, deliberately was spoken of inspiration by Apollo and instruction by Mercury, since the authors in question in their views on literature very consciously combined the ideas of *ingenium* and *ars*, of innate talent and acquired skill. The relation between both to a large extent determined the way of thinking about language, literature, and visual arts in the sixteenth century.<sup>16</sup> While literary historians have often considered them as opposites,<sup>17</sup> here, on the contrary, they are seen as complementary.

To start with language: while the use of the vernacular was determined by custom, the practice of Latin was a matter of art. The writing of vernacular literature after classical examples therefore came down to combining custom and art. This is why *ars* and *ingenium*, imitation

<sup>16</sup> Castor G., *Pléiade Poetics. A Study in Sixteenth-Century Thought and Terminology* (Cambridge: 1964) 42, 46, 115; Maddox D., "Inventing invention: process in Pléiade poetics", *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 15 (1985) 211–230, esp. 218; Jeanneret M., *A Feast of Words. Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance* (Oxford: 1991) 193.

<sup>17</sup> Influential in this connection for the Dutch literary historiography is: Witstein S.F., "Lucas wist nog meer", in Witstein S.F., *Een Wett-steen vande Ieught. Verzamelde artikelen*, ed. Harmsen T. – Krol E. (Groningen: 1980) 153–156.

and invention, are central to Pléiade poetics. Art (*ars*) one learned by following rules, by imitating. The following of nature likewise supposed a form of imitation, or better: copying, namely of everything one saw around oneself, including one's own environment. In addition, everything that was innate to the author, non-acquired – such as creativity, imagination, and inspiration – belonged to nature. These things had to be developed and perfected by means of art. Those who did not have them by nature, as a talent, could not develop them further through art. Essential to the view of the vernacular – the mother tongue – is that it was likewise innate, a gift of nature, a form of inspiration or *ingenium*, different from Latin and all other foreign languages, which had to be acquired and, seen from the perspective of the mother tongue, possessed an embellished, cultivated character. In short, they were a form of art.

This meant that the Dutch language had to be perfected by means of Latin, after the example of already cultivated vernaculars like Italian and French. Where literature is concerned, the relation between *ars* and *ingenium* extended beyond linguistic usage to literary composition (genre and style) and to the choice of subject matter. This meant that both the language and the literature of antiquity (and of the foreign languages and literatures modeled after it) were considered examples of vernacular traditions. Besides the Dutch language itself, the literature written in Dutch also belonged to nature, to the tradition in which the poet was raised. Therefore, it fit the relation between Dutch on the one hand and Latin, French, and Italian on the other, to hold on to the Dutch language and its literature, not out of incompetence or incomprehension, but out of a self-aware attitude and a strong realisation of the natural origins of both. In the case of vernacular literatures the perfection of nature through art had in some respect already taken place. After all, the production of poetry and theatre in the vernacular was for centuries executed according to rules that also belonged to tradition and had over time come to be seen as a part of nature. It fit this notion to lend a classical aura to the vernacular literary tradition and to compare it in a positive sense to the literature of antiquity. The other way around, Latin, French, and Italian could not be considered exclusively artificial languages. They too had natural origins and could boast a specific history and character.

Thus, art and nature became closely associated. In fact, the notion of nature knew two sides. There was created nature (*natura naturata*) – nature as made by God – and nature as creative force (*natura*



*naturans*).<sup>18</sup> The latter was identified with the creative abilities of authors from both classical antiquity and the vernacular past. Their creations had in effect improved nature and had begun to represent a second, ideal nature. These they could imitate with absolute conviction. So in the sixteenth century it was perfectly legitimate to hold as an example other, especially deceased, poets, and imitate them. This practice supposed a high degree of familiarity with written examples and a culture of study and knowledge, practice and improvement. This way, nature eventually became a form of art again.

The conclusion is that for the poets in question invention was a matter both of *ars* and *ingenium*, of imagination as well as imitation. They sought a balance, too, between Dutch and Latin, and between the literatures written in both languages. Their balancing act extended to the relation between art and rhetoric. As mentioned before, poetry was inspired, while rhetoric was acquired. Even though many poets in the course of the sixteenth century started to stress that poetry was wrongly referred to as rhetoric, they remained closely connected in theory and practice.

The reasons for continuing to view their art as a form of rhetoric, or at least for associating the one with the other, lay in the rhetoricians' inclusive literary view – anyone could learn to write poetry; what lacked in talent could be made up by practice – and in the public function they assigned to literature. With their plays, songs, and refrains they wanted to play a role in the public debate on social, political, and religious matters.<sup>19</sup> Their culture of competition offered a government-sanctioned framework for this. Anyone who held the view that literature, both in terms of its production and of its reception, was not the domain of the few but of the many did not separate it from rhetoric, no matter how often vernacular poets in the sixteenth century – Matthijs de Castelein being one of them – claimed that they wrote poetry out of a divine spark. In practice, everything that was

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<sup>18</sup> Bialostocki J., "The Renaissance Concept of Nature and Antiquity", in *The Renaissance and Mannerism. Studies in Western Art. Acts of the Twentieth International Congress of the History of Art 2* (Princeton: 1963) 19–30, esp. 20, 26–27.

<sup>19</sup> Regarding this role, see especially Dixhoorn A. van, *Lustige geesten. Rederijkers in de Noordelijke Nederlanden (1480–1650)* (Amsterdam: 2009); Dixhoorn A. van, "Chambers of Rhetoric: Performative Culture and Literary Sociability in the Early Modern Northern Netherlands", in Dixhoorn A. van – Sutch S.S. (eds.), *The Reach of the Republic of Letters. Literary and Learned Societies in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 168 (Leiden: 2008) vol. 1, 119–157.

associated with divine inspiration – knowledge of classical literature, mythology, and history, and the ability to incorporate these in poetry – did not automatically bubble up inside poets. Writing poetry was considered a matter of study and practical skill, and presumed the ability to imitate creatively.

### *De Const van Rhetoriken*

The work in which this double (or, if one prefers, hybrid) view of literature as being poetry as well as rhetoric was first put forward – and, in six reprints, propagated until the beginning of the seventeenth century – was *De Const van Rhetoriken* by Matthijs de Castelein from Oudenaarde (fig. 1). The book was published posthumously in 1555 in Ghent, Flanders. The last reprints appeared in Rotterdam, Holland, where the view in question would persist until after the turn of the century.<sup>20</sup> De Castelein was a parish priest who, apart from some form of lower education, was supposedly entirely self-educated.<sup>21</sup> He must have made classical culture his own through self-tuition, perhaps with the help of his circle of friends, some of whom were academically schooled. De Castelein must have acquired the skill of writing vernacular poetry and plays in the local chamber of rhetoric.<sup>22</sup> At some point the town of Oudenaarde counted three chambers, which eventually all appointed him as their *factor* – proof of his reputation as a poet.

In his introductory letter to the *Const*, Jan Cauweel, its publisher, makes clear that he approves of the fact that ‘Netherlandish’ (‘Nederlandsche’) poets, following the example of the ‘French’ (‘Fransooy-sen’), now let their work appear in print. In this context he names both ‘rhetoriquers’ and Pléiade-poets. Additionally, he calls on the ‘Netherlanders’ (‘Nederlanders’) to embellish and enrich their language by

<sup>20</sup> Iansen S.A.P.J.H., *Verkenningen in Matthijs Casteleins Const van Rhetoriken*, *Neerlandica Traiectina* 18 (Assen: 1971) 23–24.

<sup>21</sup> Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 13, 14, n. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Regarding De Castelein in general, see Coigneau D., “Matthijs de Castelein: ‘excellent Poëte moderne’”, *Verslagen en mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* (1985) 451–475; Ramakers B., “Between Aea and Golgotha. The Education and Scholarship of Matthijs de Castelein (c. 1485–1550)”, in Goudriaan K. – Molenbroek J. van – Tervoort A. (eds.), *Education and Learning in the Netherlands, 1400–1600. Essays in Honour of Hilde de Ridder-Symoens*, *Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History* 123 (Leiden: 2004) 179–199.



Fig. 1. Matthijs de Castelein, *De konst van Rhetoriken* (Rotterdam, Felix van Sambix, 1612) title page, Groningen University Library

distributing their poetry written in the vernacular through the printing press.<sup>23</sup> Thus, he emphatically places De Castelein's work in a self-aware vernacular tradition.

From the beginning poetry and rhetoric are linked in the *Const*. As mentioned before, there existed a classical basis for this.<sup>24</sup> De Castelein starts off explaining that he received the assignment to write his work from Mercury, 'who is skillful in the art' ('die de const wel can').<sup>25</sup> The 'Poets' ('Poëten') consider him their god, who is never lacking 'fine words' ('Schoon sprake').<sup>26</sup> This way, the god of rhetoric has simultaneously become the god of poetry. The connection is, as it were, in his genes. After all, Mercury descended to earth 'from Mount Parnassus' ('Vuten beergh Parnaso') by order of his brother Apollo, god of harmony and music.<sup>27</sup> Not surprisingly, De Castelein calls poets 'Mercurists' ('mercuristen').<sup>28</sup> For him, it is clear as day: there is no difference between 'the orators and this profession' ('den Orateurs ende dit profes'), meaning between rhetoric and poetry, nor between 'Flemish and Latin rhetoric' ('Rhetorijcke Vlaemsch ende Latijn'), nor between literature in the vernacular and in Latin, for which he refers to Cicero.<sup>29</sup> Poetry is simply called 'rhetoric' ('Rhetorica'). And even though he quotes many orators, according to De Castelein, both poetry and prose are forms of 'common rhetoric' ('ghemeen Rethorike').<sup>30</sup> Both, too, exist of a combination of 'fine words' ('schoonsprake') – which is the 'root of both' ('de wortel van hen beeden')<sup>31</sup> – and 'fine argument' ('schoon redene'). They are about 'well-chosen language with a good conclusion'.<sup>32</sup>

In the two stanzas that are quoted next as eulogies for 'noble Rhetoric' ('edel Rethorike') and for 'Oratory' ('Oratie'), we may without

<sup>23</sup> Castelein Matthijs de, *De Const van Rhetoriken [...]* (Ghent: Jan Cauweel, 1555) fol. ♣ij<sup>v</sup>–iiij<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 63–68.

<sup>25</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 10; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 63. The references to the *Const* relate to the numbered theory strophes. The references to the unnumbered example poems are accompanied by the page number.

<sup>26</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 12; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 63.

<sup>27</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 20; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 64.

<sup>28</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* 81, st. 6; 214, st. 2; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 64.

<sup>29</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 34; Cicero, *De oratore* I.70 (Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 167).

<sup>30</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 33; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 166–167.

<sup>31</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 35; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 168: 'wel ghepackte tale met goeder conclusie'.

doubt read 'Poetry' for both.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the difference between a musical-poetic and a rhetorical-argumentative approach to poetry does not come up with De Castelein. 'They who rhyme are called musicians and poets'.<sup>34</sup> Music may be older than rhetoric, but to him this is no reason to think of the one as more important or higher than the other. Music and rhetoric are as husband and wife, as two sisters; their children raise each other.<sup>35</sup> In connection to the relation between poetry and music, a statement by the French *rhétoricien* Jean Molinet (1435–1507) is often referred to: 'Vernacular rhetoric [that is, poetry] is a sort of music which is called rhythmic'.<sup>36</sup> However, this equalisation of rhetoric and music does actually reach back to Quintilian and therefore has a foundation in classical rhetoric.<sup>37</sup> The fact that a poem can furthermore be interpreted as an oration to which the rules of rhetoric apply is proven in different parts of the *Const*. For example, De Castelein calls invention, disposition, and eloquence the 'three Parts' ('drie Léden') which 'embellish the speech' ('de reden verchieren').<sup>38</sup> Additionally, poets are people who 'teach, delight, and move' ('doceren / Verbliden en moueren') – like orators.<sup>39</sup> Also, the genres which they practise – 'comedies, tragedies, and deeds [...] of great men'<sup>40</sup> – can be compared to the three *genera dicendi*. Occasionally, a poem is also simply called 'oration' ('oratie').<sup>41</sup>

Literary historians adhere to the opinion that the *Const* has little to do with classical rhetoric. It is said to be a *seconde rhétorique*, a poets' handbook with instructions on rhyme and strophic forms, not a *premiere rhétorique*, an art of rhetoric in its proper sense.<sup>42</sup> De Castelein did indeed for numerous instructions base himself on such a *seconde*

<sup>33</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 29, 35, 39; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 168–169.

<sup>34</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 127: 'Rhymers [...] Syn musicienen en poëten ghe-naemd'. Cf. also: Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 72; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 200: 'meest Rhetorisiens [...] Heeten Poëten'.

<sup>35</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 128: 'Zij adhereren eenpaer, als man met wijfue, / Ghelijck twee ghezusters regnerende eerbaer / De iueghd vander eene volghd dander naer, / Ende sughen elck anderen d'maergh vten lijue'.

<sup>36</sup> 'Rhetorique vulgaire est une espece de musique apellée richmique'.

<sup>37</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* I.10.10 (Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 235).

<sup>38</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 94.

<sup>39</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 72; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 201.

<sup>40</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 73; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 202: 'Commedien, Tragedien en Gesten [...] van grooten heeren'.

<sup>41</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 100; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 219.

<sup>42</sup> Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 90–91; Spies M., 'Developments' 41.



*rhétorique*, that is *L'Art de Rhétorique* by Jean Molinet.<sup>43</sup> But especially considering the many additions from Cicero's *De oratore* and Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* in the *Const*, which were not taken from Molinet's work, it becomes apparent that De Castelein strove for more than just a superficial connection between poetry and rhetoric. He may claim somewhere that he is not going to discuss the whole of classical rhetoric,<sup>44</sup> but the process in which poems are brought about, their effect and social function, all these things are explicitly anchored in and accompanied by quotations and paraphrases from the two works from which sixteenth-century authors derived their knowledge of that particular *ars*. It has been suggested that De Castelein had excerpted them according to the notebook system (topically organised lists of quotations) in order to be able to refer to them in his book.<sup>45</sup> Iansen, whose search for De Castelein's sources still commands great admiration, suggests that De Castelein found classical rhetoric either too complicated to treat extensively, or that he took its content to be on the whole known among his readers.<sup>46</sup>

Either way, De Castelein sought to distinguish the poetry of his fatherland, Flanders, from that of the French-speaking regions. He is very aware that the *Const* is the first poetry handbook 'in the Flemish tongue' ('in de vlaemsche tonghe').<sup>47</sup> While Molinet, whom he calls the 'Walloon' ('wale' or 'walsche'),<sup>48</sup> wrote his *L'Art de Rhétorique* in prose, De Castelein consciously chose rhyme.<sup>49</sup> Iansen summarises De Castelein's attitude towards Molinet as follows: 'He deviates from Molinet, but less from a downright pertness than from deliberate motives of Flemish tradition and classical rhetoric'.<sup>50</sup> The Flemish tradition is a more important authority than Molinet.<sup>51</sup> Something can be 'formu-

<sup>43</sup> Written between 1482 and 1492 (Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 89–89). De Castelein supposedly owned a manuscript of it (Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 99).

<sup>44</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 55; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 104, 181–186. In st. 88 De Castelein explains what he is going to discuss, and these are indeed the then-employed strophic forms.

<sup>45</sup> Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 162–163.

<sup>46</sup> Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 182, 271–272.

<sup>47</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 236.

<sup>48</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 157, 219; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 117–118.

<sup>49</sup> Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 78–80.

<sup>50</sup> Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 97.

<sup>51</sup> Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 161.

lated authoritatively' ('gheautoriseerd staen') with him,<sup>52</sup> but the vernacular tradition always weighs heavier.<sup>53</sup>

De Castelein generally describes the poetical habits of the French (or 'Walloon' ['walen'], as he calls them)<sup>54</sup> fairly neutrally, but sometimes disapprovingly.<sup>55</sup> Usually, for him it is about determining the Flemish 'nativeness' with respect to the writing of poetry. For instance, according to the 'custom of the Walloon region' ('stilen vander Walscher prouincie') poetic genres there sometimes have different names than in Flanders.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the length of verse lines 'in this region' ('hier ind land') amounts to between nine and twelve syllables.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the 'Flemish community' ('vlaemsche natie') follows different rules concerning the refrain.<sup>58</sup> Either way, rules are there to be maintained 'in these regions' ('in deez landen').<sup>59</sup>

Incidentally, 'Flemish' does not necessarily mean 'better'. According to De Castelein, each language has its own 'energy' ('enargie'),<sup>60</sup> with which he does not refer to the rhetorical principal of the lively description or *evidentia*, but to the phenomenon that every language possesses its own nature or force. As a consequence, something considered natural in one language can come across as unnatural in another, and vice versa.<sup>61</sup> For De Castelein, 'every language is judge' ('elcks tale is consentere') of what can and cannot be done in poetry.<sup>62</sup> Besides knowledge of the language, insight in the history and literature of one's own country is essential: 'Read history [...], go over Flemish

<sup>52</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 140.

<sup>53</sup> Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 115.

<sup>54</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 110, 133.

<sup>55</sup> He establishes that the French approve rhyme between diphthongs and some vowels, which he, to be sure, finds absurd, but does not really condemn. Through pronunciation and accent, French lyric poets rhymed words that actually did not rhyme (Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 133–135; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 93–95). He is very outspoken in his rejection of the French habit of using 'equivoques' and 'redites' (Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 89–90; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 108), where he, incidentally, is in accordance with some Pléiade poets (Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 114–115). The distinction the French made between male (perfect) and female (imperfect) rhyme he found nonsense as well (Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 110; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 117–118).

<sup>56</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 156.

<sup>57</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 102.

<sup>58</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 159.

<sup>59</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 181.

<sup>60</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 109, 133.

<sup>61</sup> Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 118–119.

<sup>62</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 148.

deeds, study poetry',<sup>63</sup> he admonishes his apprentices. He speaks of 'our mother tongue' ('ons moeders tale'),<sup>64</sup> but there is no question of language chauvinism. On the contrary, the orientation on 'Latin and other languages' ('Latijn ende ander talen') remains important no matter what.<sup>65</sup> Poetry is boundless. After all, 'Both in Flanders, and in other regions' the clothes of Lady Rhetoric are torn<sup>66</sup> – in other words, one finds despisers of poetry everywhere.

The bracketing together of 'Flemish deeds' and 'poetry' betrays the double orientation De Castelein recommends the young poet: on the literature and history of his own region as well as on that of antiquity, including mythology. Not everything from native soil finds mercy. More folkloristic literary matter, incorporated in popular chapbooks, for instance, is heavily criticised.<sup>67</sup> De Castelein in the *Const* presents vernacular poetry as classical. The native literary tradition answers to the same rules and goals that authors from antiquity – the frequently mentioned 'Poets' ('Poëten') with their 'old customs' ('aude seden')<sup>68</sup> – formulated for their poetry and prose. At the same time, he points out to his readers the example of the 'elders' ('auwers') of the Flemish tradition, how they 'practised' ('ghevseert') poetry,<sup>69</sup> and calls on his audience to stay with their 'old customs' ('haude stilen') and in certain respects not to imitate the French.<sup>70</sup>

There is a possibility that De Castelein with the choice of the word 'ghevseert', alluded to the Latin term *usus*, which in a rhetorical sense indicates local customs and habits, which the poet or rhetorician should not repudiate if he wants to reach his readers or listeners. Although it is nowhere explicitly formulated, it does appear that for De Castelein the close connection between the vernacular and the classical tradition had to do with the naturalness of the former, which should be perfected through the artfulness and erudition of the latter. Of course, classical literature also possessed a high degree of naturalness – after all, it represented the ideal, perfect nature – and consequently it was logical

<sup>63</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 42: 'Leest historien [...] / Overloopt Vlaemsche gesten, studeerd poëtrye'. The word 'Poëtrie' also in st. 225.

<sup>64</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 119.

<sup>65</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 98; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 218.

<sup>66</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 29: 'Alzo wel in Vlaenderen, als in ander landen'.

<sup>67</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 96; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 187, n. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 102, 109, 161–163, 165, 170.

<sup>69</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 104; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 230.

<sup>70</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 110.



to look for accordance between the classical and the vernacular. This already becomes clear from De Castelein's remark regarding the natural length of verse lines – as long as 'one breath' ('eenen aesseme')<sup>71</sup> – but also, for instance, from the ease with which he connects formal features of vernacular genres of poetry with those of classical ones. He is very firm in his claim that Martial stipulated the maximum length of a refrain and that Martial's epigrams never counted more than twenty lines.<sup>72</sup> No matter how incorrect this last claim actually is, it is certain that De Castelein knew Martial's work firsthand.

In light of the striving for purification and austerity of language and imagery later on in the sixteenth century, it is striking to read how natural an elegant style and subject matter were for De Castelein – and how closely linked to classical examples. Flemish poets know all too well 'their styles and their manners' ('haer stilen ende haer manieren'). On the basis of a passage from Quintilian, who compares the comical, tragic, and epic style to three figures from Homer's *Iliad*, he attributes to the rhetoricians the ability to 'produce' ('fabriqueren') comedies, to 'practice' ('hantieren') tragedies, and to 'embellish' ('verchieren') historical deeds.<sup>73</sup> The choice of words in this last case is meaningful. The poet 'embellishes' his work by choosing his subjects (or examples and arguments) from the 'poetrie' – the classical history and mythology. His task to a large extent consists of this enriching – also by choice of words and imagery – of his poems, after the example of classical poets and orators:

These were all men in life respected,  
 Who for the benefit of art embellished it,  
 Who enunciated speeches, strong and virtuous,  
 Adorning their words, elegantly [and] ornately,  
 Illustrating their opinion in due manner,  
 From which we derive this art,  
 Which is called Rhetoric [and which is] pleasant.  
 For all that relates to it,  
 Must be well-considered, fine and elegant.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 102; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 222–223.

<sup>72</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 97; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 216–217.

<sup>73</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 73; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* XII.10.64 (Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 202–203); 'verchieren' also in stanza 222, 225.

<sup>74</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 45; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 172–173: 'Dit waren alle mannen ind leuen statelic, / Der consten batelic, die decorerende, / Die de redenen vudtten sterck ende matelic, / Verchierende haer worden, elegant ornatelic, / Haer propositien proprelick illustrerende, / Daer wy dese const, vut zijn extenderende /

Throughout the *Const*, De Castelein drives home the importance of embellishments on all levels, in accordance with the rhetorical principle of the *ornatus*, the 'plentitude of words' ('couuere van woorden'),<sup>75</sup> and a varied lexicon. In short, he advocates the principle of *copia et varietas*.<sup>76</sup> He commends on the basis of Cicero the work of the great Greek historians, among others 'Thimaeus's ornate sententions, full of eloquence, sweet in taste'.<sup>77</sup> The 'unlearned' ('ongheleerde') have no knowledge of classical examples, or *exempla*. These are unknown to them 'like colour is to the blind' ('ghelijck den blenden tcoluer').<sup>78</sup> The reference to colour is interesting in connection to the rhetorical 'colours' ('Colueren') or *colores rhetorici*, to the tropes with which poems could also be embellished.<sup>79</sup> De Castelein connects the difference in talent between poets with the variety in lexicon, through which each poet's work is differently 'coloured', rich and varied as a wildflower meadow in summer.<sup>80</sup> The poet must fight – here he paraphrases Quintilian – 'with the power of words, illustrated and embellished extraordinarily [but] modestly'.<sup>81</sup> He must 'always strive after fine words',<sup>82</sup> but avoid 'everyday language' ('tdaghelicks sermoen') – that is, colloquial speech – for which he falls back on Quintilian again.

In the preceding strophe he then already has (with an appeal to Cicero, in whose work, by the way, the location is untraceable) emphasised that the true art of poetry lies in invention, 'In speeches made with diligence'.<sup>83</sup> There are poetic genres, named 'tittelen', that 'embellish poetry' ('Tdicht zeer verchieren') because they let 'shine through' ('duerstralen') a hidden 'meaning' ('sin'). One 'illustrates' ('illustreerd')

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Diemen Rethorike naemd plaisantelick: / Vvant al dat haer es competerende / Moet beleedt sijn, fray ende elegantelick'.

<sup>75</sup> He mentions 'Ornatien' as a poet's separate task (Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 55; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 184, 189, n. 2).

<sup>76</sup> Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 190.

<sup>77</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 31; Cicero, *De oratore* II.55–58 (Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 164–165): 'Thimaeus ornate sententien / Vul eloquentien, zeer zoete van smake'.

<sup>78</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 52; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 178.

<sup>79</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 88; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 106–107.

<sup>80</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 62; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 191.

<sup>81</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 66; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* VIII.3.2–3; VIII.3.60 (Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 194): 'metter vvorden macht / Gheillustreerd ende verchierd bouen maten matelick'.

<sup>82</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 66: 'naer schoon vocabelen op elc saeysoen spoen'.

<sup>83</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 65: 'In de redenen ghemaect met diligentien'.

all languages with it.<sup>84</sup> How much embellishment in style and subject matter are connected becomes clear in a reference to Cicero that is traceable, where he writes that in relation to the poet Thucydides it was not clear 'Whether the words were embellished with meaning or [the other way around] the content with words'.<sup>85</sup>

The conviction that writing poetry comes down to embellishing is phrased most powerfully – and apparently in spite of criticism – in regards to the defence of neologisms.<sup>86</sup> Contrary to language purists who, especially at the end of the sixteenth century in the Northern Netherlands, thought of a Dutch equivalent for every foreign word, De Castelein deems such an approach not only unnatural – as unfamiliar to the way in which languages develop themselves – but also in conflict with the humanistic striving for renewal of the mother tongue through the study of Latin and of other vernaculars. It is again not a matter of language chauvinism:

You may use loan words, whoever disapproves,  
For it concerns an already long-existing custom.  
As the sun illustrates a fine day,  
And the moon illuminates the night,  
Thus loan words light a fine poem.  
Formulate your plea in this manner,  
[To whom] says that loan words are under discussion,  
[Since] people do not understand such a recitation [with loan words],  
And that one may not think of anything new.<sup>87</sup>

In the first strophe, De Castelein unabashedly uses the word 'Schuum', which means 'scum' or 'waste', and in relation to language indicates an impure choice of words, that is, the use of loan words. These may not be used to adorn poems, the critics found, for the audience would not

<sup>84</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 221.

<sup>85</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 51; Cicero, *De oratore* II.56 (Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 177–178): 'Of den worden metten zin of metter reden dbeleet / Verchierd was'.

<sup>86</sup> Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 231, 520–522 points out two more places where De Castelein alludes to discussions in literary circles about the use of certain words and the extent to which instructions by rhetoricians such as Quintilian had to be followed.

<sup>87</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 111–113; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 226–227: 'Schuum mueghd ghy wel stellen wiedt reprobeerd, / Vvant het es ghevseerd ouer langhe spacie: / Ghelijc de Zonne den schoonen dagh illustreerd, / Ende de Mane den nacht, illumineerd, / Alzo verlichtt schuum een schoone oratie. / Dat ghy formeren zoudt dijn allegatie, / Zegghende dat tschuum staet te verdijnghene, / Tvolck en verstaet gheen zulcke prolatie, / Ende men en behoord niet nieus op te brijnghene'.

understand such words. In the following two strophes he then explains that if the Greeks had not invented new words, one could not read and use them today. The lexicon of a language just consisted of old and new words. The classical languages too had constantly renewed themselves in this respect. De Castelein falls back on classical authorities to prove this. In order to propagate the renewal of the French language, his contemporaries Du Bellay and Thomas Sebillet (1512–1589) had done the same.<sup>88</sup> Otherwise, he is not completely uncritical of loan words. Elsewhere he talks about ‘words’ (‘vocabelen’) that are ‘bad Flemish’ (‘quaed vlaemsch’).<sup>89</sup>

Additionally, De Castelein does not shun the comparison of poetry with the physical and the natural. A good poem is like a body, plant, or construction, with ‘bones, flowers, beams’ (‘botten, blommen, brancken’).<sup>90</sup> Nothing is lovelier than a ‘fine speech, which flows from the mouth, well cared for and with sturdy parts’.<sup>91</sup> No matter how much poetry needs to be perfected through schooling and regulation – his handbook itself forms the proof of this – still De Castelein is convinced that essentially it stems from nature.<sup>92</sup> This is why the poet has to ‘move nature and also gratify’ (‘De natuere mouére ende oock verblyde’), which is an allusion to Quintilian’s statement that doctrine (*doctrina*) forms and that nature (*natura*) is formed.<sup>93</sup> As said before, he gives a direct example of how natural poetry is by posing that a line of poetry lasts as long as can be uttered in one breath. The concept of nature also plays a role in other places. Thus all art – in this respect De Castelein names three classical authors and painters – has one ‘nature’, meaning a series of customs, laws, and ground rules that have to be followed. Aside from this, what is added by the individual artist or author is personal touch, assimilation, and phrasing.<sup>94</sup> Every poet feels attracted ‘to his own nature’ (‘tot zijns zelfs nature’) and so possesses a personal choice of words and imagery.<sup>95</sup> After all, poets have varying

<sup>88</sup> Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 228–229.

<sup>89</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 118; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 232.

<sup>90</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 151.

<sup>91</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 38; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 168–169: ‘schoon redene, die vter mond uut lijdt / Wel ghecouchierd [verzorgd] met vullen leden’.

<sup>92</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 101; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 220: ‘dees const om des consts besueren / Rijst vter naturen, van auden tyde’.

<sup>93</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* II.19.3 (Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 221).

<sup>94</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 59; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 188–189.

<sup>95</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 62.

talents and aptitudes, for example, one for more serious matters, the other for farcical. The one who has mastered both is the best.<sup>96</sup>

The relation between imitation and imagination is alluded to in a strophe in which he gives a recital of parts concerning content and stylistic parts (for the majority derived from rhetoric) that the poet can incorporate. One of these he calls 'Imitatie'. The poet must search for all these parts, he concludes, 'midts Imagination', which means as much as 'with creativity', 'as one searches for a way out of a thorny situation'.<sup>97</sup> About De Castelein's thoughts on imitation or on the functioning of imagination, however, we do not learn anything more.

De Castelein also examines the relation between the art of poetry and the art of painting. He advises the poet to be familiar with all visual arts, but to remember that they are obviously inferior to the art of poetry in one respect: they are mute, not alive, not literally eloquent, as rhetoric is (fig. 2):

No speech will amount to anything without its [rhetoric's] strength.  
 Several great scholars have expressed this.  
 Take all sorts of crafts under your wings,  
 Making tapestries, painting, sculpturing, furniture making,  
 And whatever else artistic happens on earth:  
 They are all mute arts, runs the right explanation,  
 Each taking up a fixed position among the peoples.  
 But [only] rhetoric, when one takes a close look,  
 Speaks eloquently and is a living art.<sup>98</sup>

Ten years later, Lucas de Heere would again place the former above the latter – for the reason that painting can directly represent reality while poetry can merely describe it. Whether the balance is tipped in favour of the one or the other art, both have much in common. De Castelein here takes his arguments from Cicero and Quintilian again. No matter how the various classical poets and painters – De Castelein names half a dozen of them – designed their work, whether on the basis of taste or intention, both arts have a basis in common customs,

<sup>96</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 99; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 219.

<sup>97</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 55; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 184–185: 'Ghelijck ghy wegh souckt om tperikel teuaderene'.

<sup>98</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 47: 'Gheen propoost en sal schijnen zonder zijn steerken, / Allerande fijn cleercken wijsen dat op niet: / Neemd van allen ambachten, onder dijn vleercken, / Tapijts maken, schilderen, beelden sniden schrijnweecken, / Ende voord wies cuenstich vp deerde gheschiet / Tzijn alle stomme consten, naer trechte bediet, / Die onder tpueple hebben een begheuede wuenste: / Maer rethorijcke alsment wel ouersiet / Spreeckt eloquentelick, ende es een leuende cuenste'.

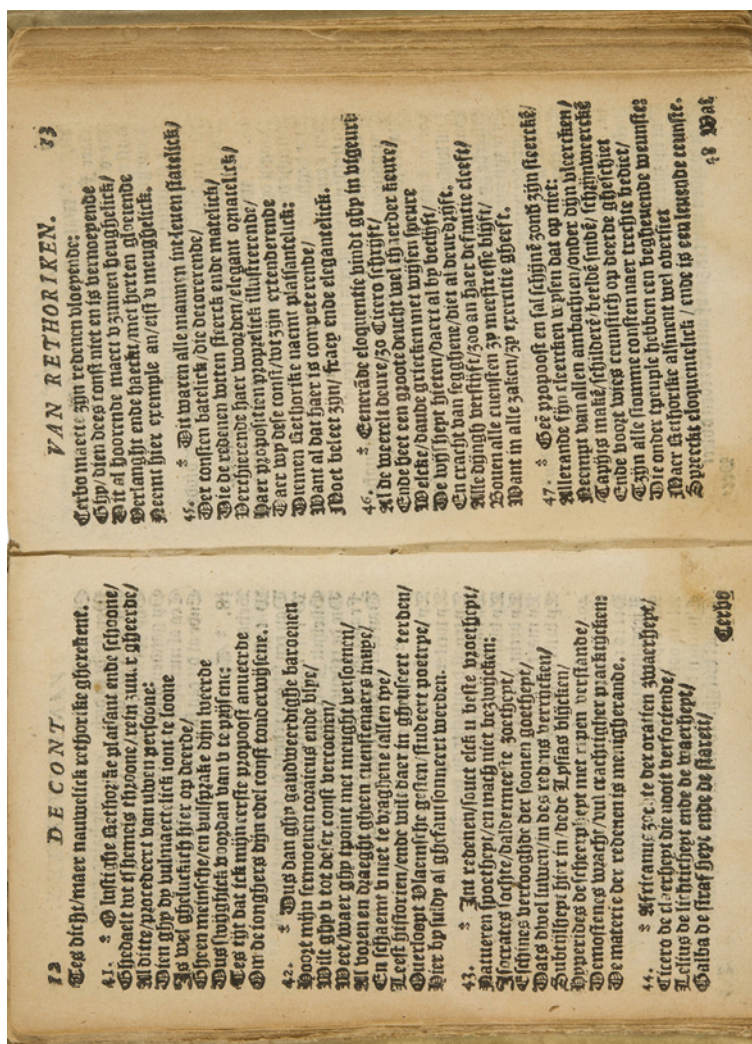


Fig. 2. Matthijs de Castelein, *De konst van Rhetoriken* (Rotterdam, Felix van Sambix, 1612) 13, Groningen University Library



laws, and ground rules, again named their 'nature'.<sup>99</sup> He subsequently adds to the physical comparison of the art of poetry an architectural one: poems are like houses or temples that are embellished with 'words' ('termen') and 'strophic forms' ('sneden') as these buildings are with 'arches and porches' ('bogh en portalen').<sup>100</sup> Additionally, the poet must remain within the bounds of the once-chosen poetic form, as the painter within the sketched lines of his design.<sup>101</sup> And as the painter Apelles represented King Antigonus in such a way that his one, blind eye was not visible, so too must the 'poet' ('Facteur') sometimes be able to obscure and conceal.<sup>102</sup> Just as striking is the example of the painter Timanthes, who, because of its intensity, could not convey Agamemnon's grief at the death of his daughter Iphigenia, and therefore painted him with his face hidden behind his cloak.<sup>103</sup> De Castelein here uses the word 'contrefaicten' for painting, which, strictly speaking, means portraying, that is, the portrayal of the human face. With just as much ease, he later on employs it as a synonym for writing verse.<sup>104</sup> Drawing from an arsenal of examples of other artists by copying and imitating was for painters as well as poets a legitimate method. Making a good likeness was an art. Lucas de Heere, in his time a celebrated portraitist, knew this as no other. To him, writing poetry meant also 'contrefaicten'.<sup>105</sup>

### *Den Hof en Boomgaerd der Poë sien*

*De Const van Rhetoriken* has been so thoroughly discussed because of the reputation that the work and its author had in the world of the rhetoricians. It laid down a notion of literature that had developed

<sup>99</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 59; Cicero, *De oratore* III.26 (Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 189–190).

<sup>100</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 60; Cicero, *De oratore* III.180 (Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 189).

<sup>101</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 100; Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 219–220.

<sup>102</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 78; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* II.13.1–10 (Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 207).

<sup>103</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 79; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* II.13.13 (Iansen S.A.P.J.A., *Verkenningen* 208).

<sup>104</sup> Castelein M. de, *Const* st. 227.

<sup>105</sup> Ramakers B., "Art and artistry in Lucas de Heere", in Chapman H.P. – Woodall J. (eds.), *Envisioning the Artist in the Early Modern Netherlands, Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 59 (2009) (Zwolle: 2010) 165–192, esp. 181–182.

among them in the course of the first half of the sixteenth century and, as mentioned earlier, persisted into the seventeenth century. Moreover, it had not before been analysed from the viewpoint chosen here. Such an analysis, however, was recently made for *Den Hof en Boomgaerd der Poë sien* by Lucas de Heere (fig. 3), which will therefore be discussed less elaborately here.<sup>106</sup> For the reconstruction of De Heere's poetics it has long been thought one could suffice with quotations from the dedicatory letter that precedes the collection. Indeed it contains important clues to the poet's theory of poetry, but so do many of the poems themselves, to which, however, little to no attention has been paid with respect to the author's poetical views. De Heere, like De Castelein, interrelates poetry and painting, with a connecting role reserved for rhetoric. By comparing it to rhetoric, it was possible to afford the art of painting a position that, in the *paragone* with poetry, finally let painting surpass poetry.<sup>107</sup> The fact that De Heere praises the incorporation of classical subject matter and claims that poetry is wrongly called rhetoric,<sup>108</sup> does not, however, mean that rhetoric did not play a role in his thinking about art and that he only held musical-poetic beliefs. In his poems he formulates thoughts that fit the rhetoricians' theory and practice of writing poetry, which equated poetry with rhetoric. Furthermore, in *Den Hof* De Heere practises native rhetoricians' forms (such as the refrain) besides classical and French genres (such as paradoxes, echoes, odes, epigrams, epitaphs, sonnets, and rhymed letters). The poems' content is chiefly religious-didactic by nature and answers to the public function that rhetoricians ascribed to their literature.

In the dedicatory letter, De Heere explains how he operated. He imitated ('naerghevolght') to the best of his ability Latin, French, and German examples more often than what he calls 'the old Flemish way of writing verse', which he deems in many respects 'too rude,

<sup>106</sup> Ramakers B., "Art and artistry". This paragraph is based on the argument there.

<sup>107</sup> Regarding this, see Puttfarken T., *Titian and Tragic Painting. Aristotle's Poetics and the Rise of the Modern Artist* (New Haven-London: 2005) 15–40; Eck C. van, *Classical Rhetoric and the Visual Arts in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge etc.: 2008), passim.

<sup>108</sup> Heere Lucas d', *Den Hof en Boomgaerd der Poë sien*, ed. Waterschoot W., *Zwolve Drukken en Herdrukken voor de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde te Leiden* 65 (Zwolle: 1969) no. IV, ll. 38–39.



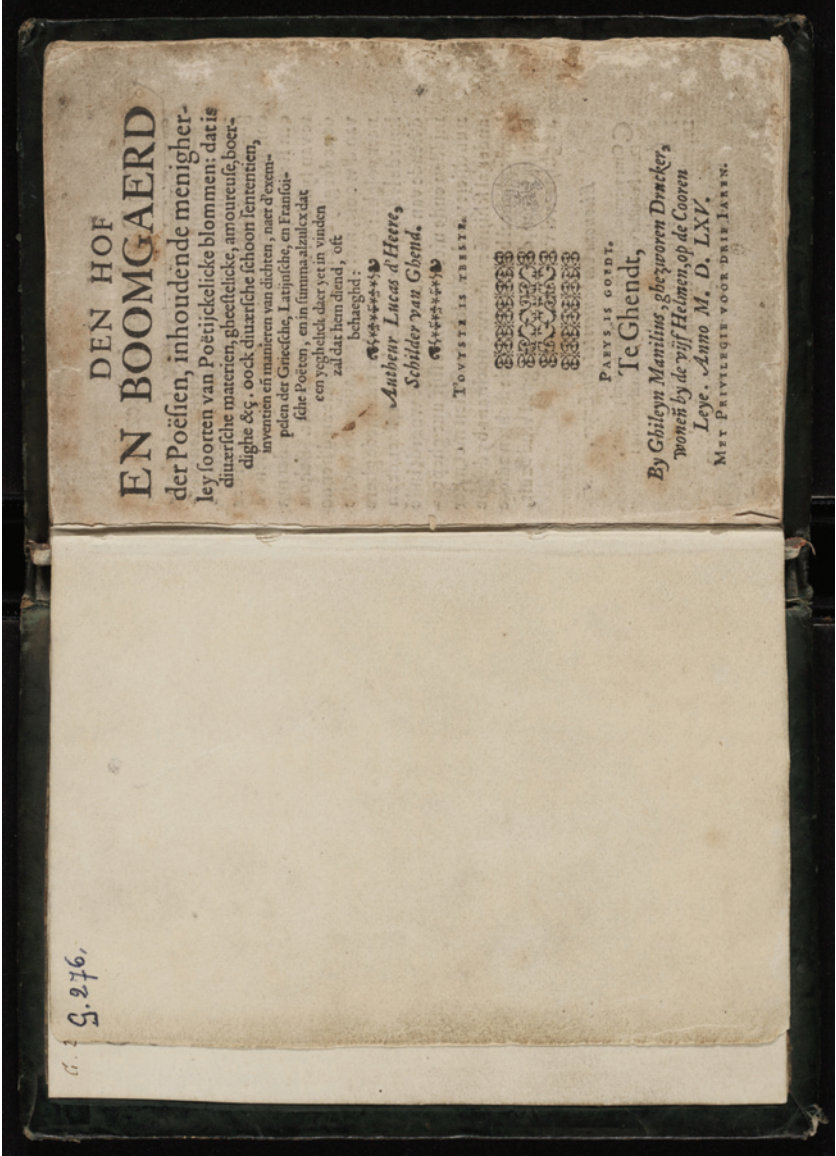


Fig. 3. Lucas d'Heere, *Den Hof en Boomgaerd der Poesien* (Ghent, Ghileyn Manilius, 1565) title page, Ghent University Library

unsuited, and free'.<sup>109</sup> But at the same time he turns against pedantic scholars ('curieuse gheleerde') – meaning humanistic authors who want to abide completely by (Neo-)Latin poetry – who, because of its lack of elegance ('gracie'), have alienated themselves from their mother tongue. They owe it more tribute than they pay it in this manner.<sup>110</sup> Further along he returns to these critics. They condemn poetry in Dutch because some poets neglect their language. But, so De Heere rhetorically remonstrates, surely one cannot condemn the apostles for Judas' treason either?<sup>111</sup>

Additionally, a strong vernacular self-awareness speaks from the following appeal: 'And above all, we ought to employ our language more to embellish it and our country'.<sup>112</sup> The practice of Dutch poetry helped increase the beauty of the language. This 'embellishing' ('vercieren') was something that De Castelein also repeatedly calls for. Subsequently, De Heere gives two examples that may be emulated in regard to the improvement of vernacular poetry: the contemporary French poets who went to great lengths to emancipate their mother tongue through literature,<sup>113</sup> and also – and here we see how much a native, Dutch literary tradition was already referred to halfway through the sixteenth century – the foundation of the Ghent chamber of rhetoric De Balsembloem (The Balsam Flower) by Duke Philip the Fair (1478–1506). As 'sovereign head chamber' De Balsembloem had been allotted a leading role in the development of literature in the mother tongue. De Heere was a member of this organisation.<sup>114</sup>

Additionally, it becomes clear that for De Heere, the practice of art did not solely rest on the primacy of divine inspiration, but also on that of imitation, not only of the classical languages and French, but just as much of the ancient, native genres. De Heere's literary versatility is a reflection of that in the field of painting and answers to one of the virtues that were mainly credited to visual artists, namely that of a 'Proteische Wandelbarkeit', which manifests itself in the ability to imitate artists, works of art, and styles. De Heere employs the term

<sup>109</sup> Heere L. d', *Hof* no. IV, ll. 34–37: 'den ouden vlaemschen treyn van dichten [...] te ruut, ongheschiet en ruum'.

<sup>110</sup> Heere L. d', *Hof* no. IV, ll. 39–41.

<sup>111</sup> Heere L. d', *Hof* no. IV, ll. 59–60, 64–67.

<sup>112</sup> Heere L. d', *Hof* no. IV, ll. 44–45: 'Ende bouen al behooren vvy ons eyghen tale meer te ghebruycken om die ende ons land te vercieren'.

<sup>113</sup> Heere L. d', *Hof* no. IV, ll. 45–50.

<sup>114</sup> Heere L. d', *Hof* no. IV, ll. 51–59.

*ingenium* ('spirit' or 'geest' in Dutch) just once, when he defends the writing of verse in the vernacular (fig. 4):

And although [...] we cannot attach to [De Heere's] or other Flemish poetry the same elegance that [Latin and French poetry] possesses: however, it should not therefore be despised, insofar at least as it reveals the spirit or the invention of poetry. Which is the essence and the body of art, by which a poet is most deserving of the honour of this name, [and of] being called divine and sublime, in accordance with the views of Cicero, Ennius, and Plato.<sup>115</sup>

In neither the remainder of the dedicatory letter nor in the poems does he return to this divine inspiration. The topoi of imitation and craftsmanship, on the other hand, which are so closely connected to the practice of writing verse in the chambers of rhetoric, he repeatedly raises implicitly as well as explicitly (mainly the former) – their significance is continually emphasised through the identification with the term 'conterfeiten'.

With the copying or imitation of classical or vernacular poetry the demand for an original invention of subject matter was obviated. In sixteenth-century art theory, it was a completely legitimate interpretation of the notion of invention, which from the nature of things supposed a great familiarity with written or painted examples and implied study and knowledge.<sup>116</sup> The same appears to be the case further along in the letter, where he once again defends the use of the mother tongue: 'if only because of good invention and beautiful subjects that have always existed among some of our Flemish poets, as is apparent from various of their works'.<sup>117</sup> There had always been vernacular poets whose work was characterised by 'good invention and beautiful subjects'. De Heere here does not only allude to contemporary colleagues

<sup>115</sup> Heere L. d', *Hof* no. IV, ll. 16–22: 'Ende al eyst [...] dat vvy dese oft ander vlaemsche poësie niet en connen toegheuen de bevallicheyt die vvel ander hebben: nochtans en is zy daerom niet te verachten, ist dat anders den gheest oft d'inuencie der Poësie daer in blijckt. D'vvelck het besonderste ende tcorpus is van der conste: en daer deur een Poëte meerst verdient de eere van desen name, Godlic en hemelsch ghenaeemt te zyne, naer d'opinie van Cicero, Ennius en Plato'.

<sup>116</sup> Weissert C., "Malerei und Künstler-virtus in der Niederlande des 16. Jahrhunderts", in Jong J. de et al. (eds.), *Virtue, virtuoso, virtuosity in Netherlandish Art 1500–1700, Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 54 (2003) (Zwolle: 2004) 27–59, esp. 41; Eck C. van, *Classical Rhetoric* 48.

<sup>117</sup> Heere L. d', *Hof* no. IV, ll. 41–44: 'al en waert maer om de goede inuentien, en fraey materien, die t'al der tijt onder eenighe van ons vlaemsche Poëten ghefloereert hebben: als blijckt by diversche haer vverken'.

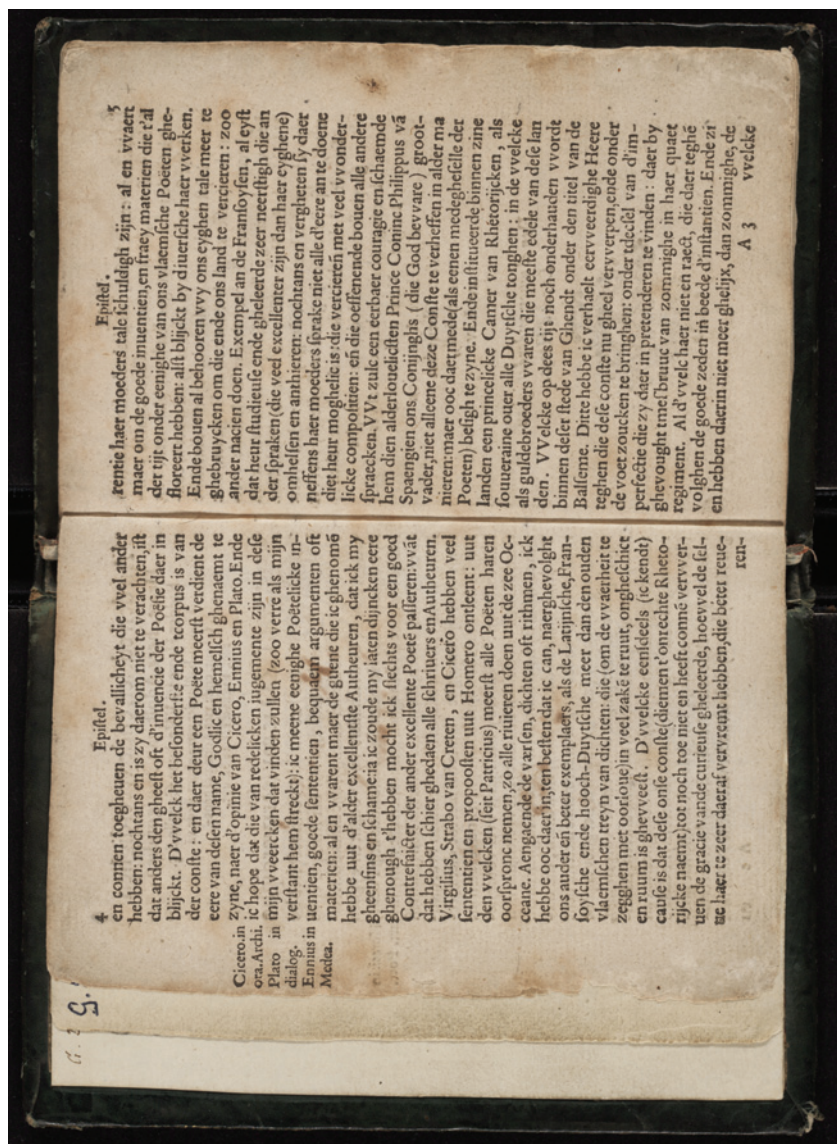


Fig. 4. Lucas d'Heere, *Den Hof en Boomgaard der Poesien* (Ghent, Ghileyn Manilius, 1565) 4-5, Ghent University Library



who wrote verse in the new manner, but also to rhetoricians from the past who had practised traditional poetic forms:

Insofar as I, honourable gentlemen, have sometimes amused myself in the pleasure garden of classical and modern poets (because such diversion befits and is customary for painters, following what Horace says: Painters and Poets [have equal licence in regard to everything]), I have taken such delight in this, that I could not refrain from imitating those [poets] (thereby resembling Echo) in our Flemish tongue [...]. And I hope that they who are fair in their judgement will find the following in this work of mine (insofar as my judgment in these matters is sufficient), I mean poetical inventions, good *sententiae*, appropriate arguments and materials, even if it is only those that I have borrowed from the most excellent authors, for which I am not in the least ashamed. Yes, I would believe that I had received enough honour if I were simply to pass for a good imitator of those other, excellent poets. For that [imitation] is what almost all writers and authors have done.<sup>118</sup>

As is apparent from his *Ode* to the Ghent Alterpiece, the same applied to early Netherlandish painters. They, too, could have been inspired and as such be inspiring to other artists. Thus, it was permissible to imitate vernacular poets from the past, too, in regard to content as well as form. This is part of the reason why De Heere himself did not only practise classical or modern French, but also rhetoricians' genres, and continued to do so.

Thus considered, invention in the sense of inspiration was not something that came from above, but that stemmed from study and the reading of literature, aspects of artistry whose value is likewise apparent throughout the collection. Such imitation supposed a practice of writing poetry according to traditional methods, in which, through exercise and repetition, one mastered the art of this 'conterfeiten'. It was no different in the painters' trade. While in *Den Hof en Boomgaerd*

<sup>118</sup> Heere L. d', *Hof* no. IV, ll. 1–6, 22–30: 'Alzo ic my (eerwerdighe Heere) zomtijds vermaect hebbe in den lustighen hof der Antique ende Moderne Poëten (ghelijc zulcke delectatie de schilders vvel vought en eyghen is, volghende dat Horacius seyt: Pictoribus atque Poëtis [Quidlibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas]) hebbe daer in zulc behaghen ghenomen dat ic my niet en const onthouden, die naer te contrefaicten (slachtende Echo) in ons vlaemsche tale, [...]. Ende ic hope dat die van redelicken jugemente zijn in dese mijn vveercken dat vinden zullen (zoo verre als mijn verstant hem streckt): ic meene eenighe Poëtelicke inuentien, goede sententien, bequaem argumenten oft materien: al en vvarent maer de guene die ic ghenomen hebbe uut d'alder excellentste Autheuren, dat ick my gheensins en schame: ia ic zoude my laten dijncken eere ghenough t'hebben mocht ick slechts for een goed Contrefaict der ander excellenten Poeten passeren: vvant dat hebben schier ghedaen alle schriuers en Autheuren'.

*der Poësie* the topos of divine inspiration remains a turn of thought, that of imitation develops in this collection to an approved mechanism, and – with reference to the visual arts – even into the guiding poetic principle, which was held into the beginning of the seventeenth century, in particular among poets who were also painters, and under evident influence of pictorial notions.

*Den Nederduytschen Helicon*

This we can tell from *Den Nederduytschen Helicon* (fig. 5), an anthology of poems by mainly Flemish poets who, because of the religious and political situation in the Southern Netherlands in the second half of the sixteenth century, had come to Holland. Most had settled in Haarlem or Leiden. Some contributors lived elsewhere, such as the painter Cornelis Ketel (1548–1616) from Amsterdam.<sup>119</sup> Publisher Passchier van Westbusch, from Menen in West-Flanders,<sup>120</sup> calls the collection in his dedicatory letter an initiative of the (in the meanwhile, deceased) painter-poet Karel van Mander,<sup>121</sup> who is named and praised repeatedly elsewhere in the collection (and had a large part in it himself). Ultimately, the collection was realised through the agency of Jacob van der Schuere (1576–after 1643), schoolmaster at the French school in Haarlem and likewise originating from Menen.<sup>122</sup> The publication of the collection and its theme of regenerating literary activity is certainly connected to the Twelve Years' Truce (1609–1621) between the Republic and Spain, which is referred to in different places. Now that the war was (temporarily) over, the moment had arrived to breath new life into literary practice.

Like De Castelein, the anthologists of the *Helicon* had mainly young readers in mind. Preceding the principal work, a sonnet is included by a poet who pursues the revealing motto 'Everyone runs short' ('Elck

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<sup>119</sup> Thijs B., *De hoefslag van Pegasus. Een cultuurhistorisch onderzoek naar Den Nederduytschen Helicon (1610)* (Hilversum: 2004) 27. The collection also included contributions by citizens of Amsterdam (Cornelis Ketel and Arnold Schepens). The author thanks Boukje Thijs for placing her transcriptions of the poems at his disposal.

<sup>120</sup> Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 28.

<sup>121</sup> *Den Nederduytschen Helicon* [...] (Alkmaar: Jacob de Meester, for Passchier van Westbusch, 1610), 4.

<sup>122</sup> Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 28.



Fig. 5. *Den Nederduytschen Helicon* (Alkmaar, Passchier van Westbusch, 1610) title page, Groningen University Library

heeft ghebreck'). He directs himself at the art-loving youth, Apollo's inquisitive disciples who, with the help of Pallas (knowledge) and Mercury (rhetoric), must go and climb the Helicon.<sup>123</sup> Boukje Thijs's research shows that *Den Nederduytschen Helicon* does indeed possess a programmatic character. The anthologists considered it their duty to show that poetry in the vernacular was capable of matching and even surpassing poetry in Latin.<sup>124</sup> The Netherlands now also had its Helicon, and according to several contributors, it was located in Haarlem. Regarding the form and content of the poems, there is a classical orientation (they are teeming with mythology), but again there is no lack of refrains. And in the more poetical contributions, the vernacular literary traditions are explicitly tied in. Thus, the poetry written on this Haarlem Helicon is also simply called rhetoric. And as Van Mander in his *Schilderboek* presents a canon of Dutch painters, so does Jasper Bernaerds for Dutch poets in the *Helicon*.<sup>125</sup> Rather than a 'pivot between rhetoric and Renaissance',<sup>126</sup> we therefore have in this collection another of many manifestations of what the literary Renaissance in the Netherlands comes down to: the blending and combining of the traditional and native with new and foreign literary forms and contents.

The attention paid to the mother tongue is evident. The *Helicon* was dedicated to Simon Stevin (1548–1620), who had won his spurs as its advocate.<sup>127</sup> The word 'Nederduytschen' in the title could bear reference to the dialect of Holland or to that of Flanders, where most of the contributors to the collection came from, but it appears sooner to allude to the whole of Dutch dialects and is mainly used to distinguish it from Latin.<sup>128</sup> In his dedicatory letter, Van Westbuch speaks of 'our inborn ancient Dutch mother tongue' ('onze aengeboren Nederduytsche oude

<sup>123</sup> Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 44.

<sup>124</sup> Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 17.

<sup>125</sup> Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 26.

<sup>126</sup> Grootes E.J., "Oorlog en vrede in *Den Nederduytschen Helicon*", in Spies M. – Jansen J. (eds.), *Visie in veelvoud. Opstellen van prof. dr. E.K. Grootes over zeventiende-eeuwse letterkunde* (Amsterdam: 1996) 53–66, esp. 53; Vermeer W., "Den Nederduytschen Helicon", in Grootes E.K. (ed.), *Haarlems Helicon. Literatuur en toneel in Haarlem vóór 1800* (Hilversum: 1993) 77–92, esp. 90; Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 15.

<sup>127</sup> Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 43.

<sup>128</sup> Jasper Bernaerd, in his rhyming dialogue between Art-Lover (Konst-beminder) and Art-Practitioner (Konst-oeffenaer), has the latter say that every time when he sees the word 'Helicon' he thinks of 'Belgica' (the alternative name for the Netherlands) and especially of Haarlem (*Helicon* 69; Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 28–29).



Moedersprake').<sup>129</sup> The *Helicon* was meant to save the Dutch language from decline. Unsurprisingly, a striving to language purism is not unfamiliar to the collection. The readers were charged with learning proper Dutch, so that they would write good poetry. At the same time, it appears that most contributors were not after stripping the Dutch language of all Latin and French loan words.<sup>130</sup>

The poems in *Den Nederduytschen Helicon* are repeatedly interrupted by parts of prose that together form a narrative framework.<sup>131</sup> Its first-person narrator moves through a pastoral landscape and during his walk observes buildings, such as a theatre and a church, on which paintings and texts (poems) are visible, which he describes and cites respectively. He also meets several people. Sometimes he chats with them, but generally he is chiefly witness to their always rhymed conversations, songs, and poems, which he, without exception, quotes fully. These together form the anthology. The observation at the end of a foursome of poets is very striking: it emerges that they are Petrarch, Marot, Ronsard, and Philippe Desportes (1546–1606), who all recite poems (partly translations) by contributors to the *Helicon*.<sup>132</sup> They, as it were, stamp an internationally artistic hallmark on the contemporary Dutch poetry.

The first three contributions and the seventh deserve special attention: the *Vreught-eyndigh Spel* by Jacob Celosse (1560–1631),<sup>133</sup> the *Choor, ofte, Versamelinghe der Muses* by Jacob van der Schuere (1576–after 1643),<sup>134</sup> the *Lofdicht der Duytscher Talen* by Dirk Woutersz. Kolenkamp,<sup>135</sup> and the *Veldt-dichtsche T'saemspraeck* by Jasper Bernaerds.<sup>136</sup> We can be brief about the second and third. Van der Schuere in his contribution explains where the Helicon was located, who the Muses are, and what the role is of their guides Mercury, Minerva, Apollo, and Aurora. He emphasises the importance of study and practice, that is, of aspects of *ars*. Understood as art in this sense, the writing of poetry led to virtue, which again was a condition for a responsible social existence. In this way, it is understandable that

<sup>129</sup> *Helicon* 3; Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 112–113, 91–105.

<sup>130</sup> Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 44–45, 101.

<sup>131</sup> Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 46–49.

<sup>132</sup> *Helicon* 301–317; Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 49, 71–72.

<sup>133</sup> *Helicon* 9–49; Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 49–50, 116–119.

<sup>134</sup> *Helicon* 50–61; Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 50–51.

<sup>135</sup> *Helicon* 61–63; Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 51–52.

<sup>136</sup> *Helicon* 66–85; Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 53.

rhetoricians did not believe in an authorship based on talent and inspiration alone – for many the way to virtue would have been inaccessible. As for Kolenkamp, he not only ventures to call the Dutch language more ancient and richer than any other language,<sup>137</sup> more ancient even than Greek and Latin, but also dares to state that, considering all uncertainty regarding the cradle of poetry, the Helicon might just as well have been a Dutch dune top, for instance the famous ‘witte blink’ (‘white shining’), a high dune top outside of Haarlem. The insistence in this poem and others on the existence, no matter how and where, of a Dutch Helicon, appears to be a reprimand of Spiegel *cum suis*, who had, after all, dismissed the writing of verse after classical examples.<sup>138</sup>

Celosse’s and Bernaerds’s contributions aimed at the formation and spreading of something like a history or canon of Dutch literature in international perspective. To begin with Celosse’s play: here, Old Custom (Oudt Ghebruyck), a personification of the vernacular literary tradition – that is, the tradition of the rhetoricians – is mocked by Momus (criticism), Silenus (inebriety), and Tirebus (idiocy). The three represent the dangers that threaten the art of poetry. Lady Rhetoric observes the spectacle with sadness. She personifies the art of poetry, quite evidently (fig. 6):

My name is Rhetoric, a pure Maid modest,  
Well-known at the Helicon, inhabitant there full of honour.  
Those who associate with me, will add joy to virtuousness.  
In the one hand I carry the sword, the symbol of justice,  
In the other the lily, which indicates the prize,  
The sound of the sweet words that flow chastely from me.<sup>139</sup>

In this way, with the sword of justice and the lily of sonorous beauty in her hands, Lady Rhetoric shows that she is eloquent as well as melodious, thus also personifying the art of poetry, and that her art is not practised altruistically. It has a mission. This is also the way in which

<sup>137</sup> Branden L. van, *Streven* 43.

<sup>138</sup> Spies M., “‘Poeetsche fabriicken’” 241; Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 52 (here also n. 14), 89–90.

<sup>139</sup> *Helicon* 11: ‘Ick heete *Redenrijck*, een reyne Maeght eerbaer, / Op *Helicon* bekent, inwoonster daer vol eeren. / Wie hem met my verselt, sal deucht met vreucht vermeerren. / In d’een hand draeg ic ’tswaert, gerechticheyts bewijs, / In d’ander ’tleyken, betoonende den prijs, / ’Tgeclanc der woorden soet, die uyt my vloeyen zedigh’.

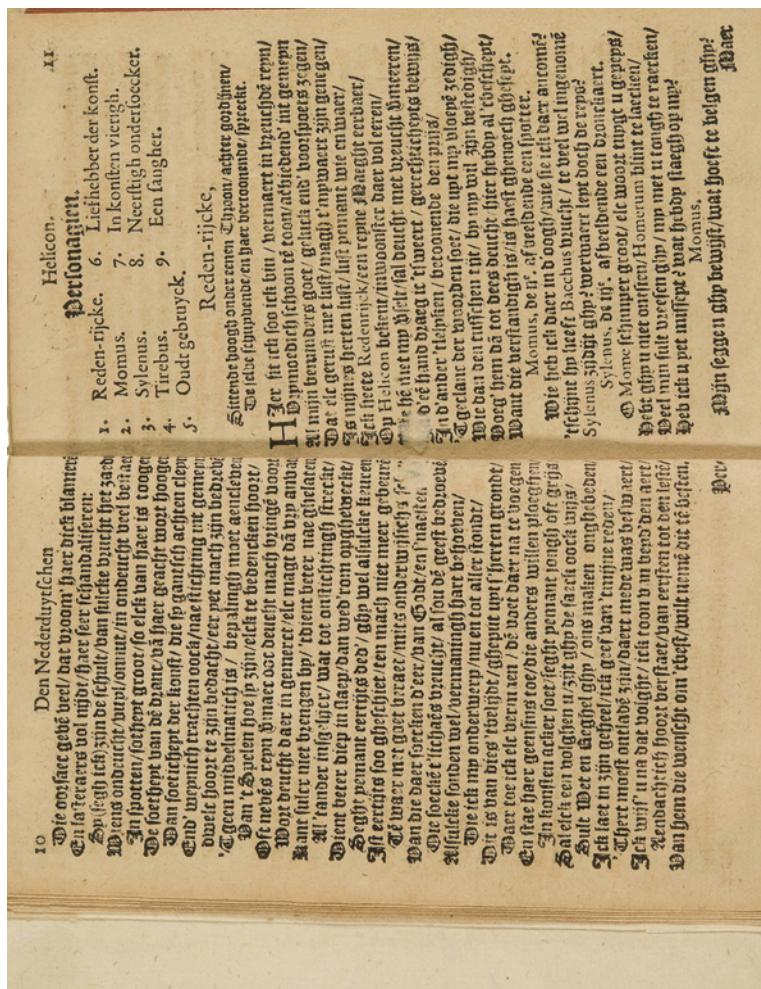


Fig. 6. Den Nederduytschen Helicon (Alkmaar, Passchier van Westbusch, 1610) 11, Groningen University Library

she is represented as frontispiece in editions of *De Const van Rhetoriken* (fig. 7).<sup>140</sup>

The three mockers and Old Custom leave the stage. Rhetoric stays behind, alone. She is joined by three personifications: Diligent Searcher (Neerstigh Ondersoecker), Lover of Art (Liefhebber der Konst), and Fervent in the Arts (In Konsten Vierigh). A stage direction describes them as ‘equipped with books, papers, pens, et cetera, representing true lovers of the art of rhetoric’.<sup>141</sup> They are all three poets, who see their pursuit as a form of rhetoric, as an art in the sense of *ars*.<sup>142</sup> They regard language from the viewpoint of that other art within the *trivium*, grammar, speak of the importance of meter (prosody) and sentence structure (syntax), and emphasise the importance of embellishment (*ornatus*) in writing verse. They show, furthermore, history books, classical and contemporary, from which they gather their knowledge, and name (besides English, Hungarian, French, and German) some Dutch poets whom they consider their examples.<sup>143</sup>

When the three mockers together with Old Custom enter again, the three mockers are silenced, after which the act focuses on Old Custom. He looks so neglected, that the three poets at first do not recognise him. To regain his original disposition – that is, his nature – they give him a book from which he reads what a true rhetorician does. He absorbs himself in the Bible, history (especially ancient history), studies others’ poetry, but also practises the art of poetry himself, ‘through which everyone is edified’ (‘waer door elck wort ghesticht’). It is his

<sup>140</sup> Spies M., “Developments” 42; Ramakers B.A.M., “Een onafscheidelijk stel. Rhetorica en Scriptura in het rederijkerstoneel”, in Abrahamse W. – Fleurkens A.C.G. – Meijer Drees M. (eds.), *Kort Tijt-verdrijf. Opstellen over Nederlands toneel (vanaf ca 1550) aangeboden aan Mieke B. Smits-Veldt* (Amsterdam: 1996) 7–14, esp. 7.

<sup>141</sup> *Helicon* 22: ‘voorsien met Boecken/ Pampieren/ Pennen/ etc. afbeeldende oprechte beminders der Konst van Redenrijcke’.

<sup>142</sup> Cornelis Ketel likewise emphasises in his contribution the aspect of art in this sense. He wonders why someone would want to learn art. Love should be the most important motive, followed by renown, monetary gain, and respect (*Helicon* 65; Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 52). In his poem, *De Kerck der Deught*, dedicated to Ketel, Van Mander emphasises that art leads especially to virtue (*Helicon* 113–133; Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 54–56).

<sup>143</sup> The names are mentioned of (in order of their listing in the book): Karel van Mander, Matthijs de Castelein, Jan van den Dale (c. 1460–1522), Jan Baptist Houwaert (1533–1599), Jeronimus van der Voort (c. 1535–after 1579), Jan van der Noot, and Marcus van Vaernewyck (1518–1569). The enumeration is concluded with two devices, ‘Oorboort Accoort’ and ‘Schade Leer’, the latter of which is an anagram of Lucas de Heere (*Helicon* 26–27).



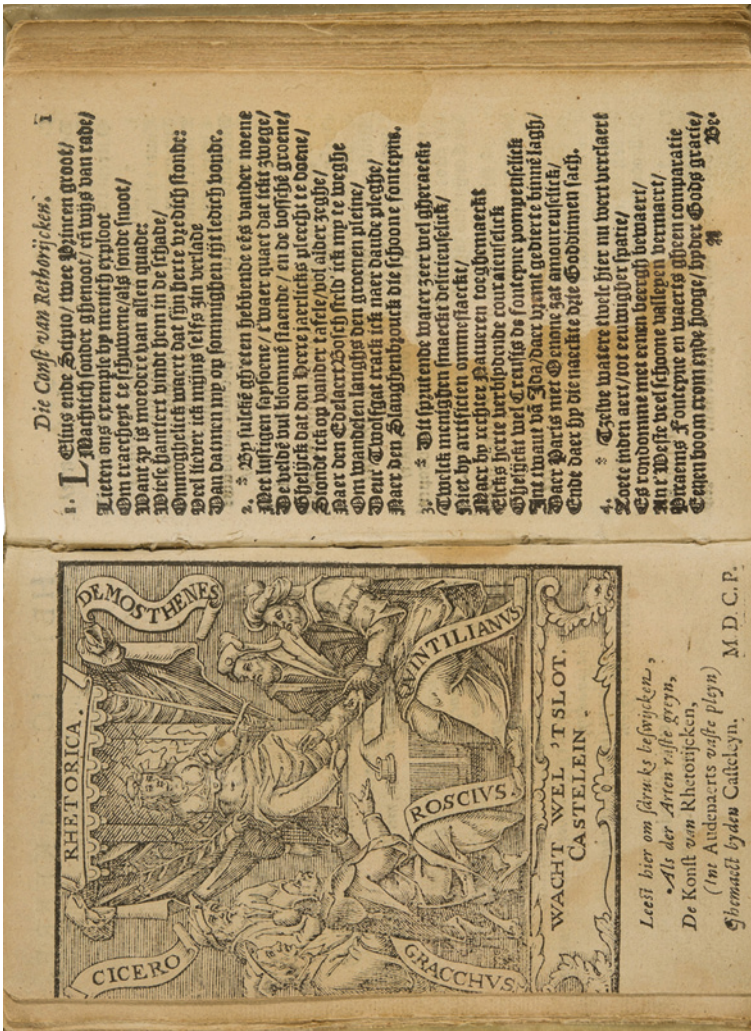


Fig. 7. Matthijs de Castelein, *De konst van Rhetoricken* (Rotterdam, Felix van Sambix, 1612)  
frontispiece, Groningen University Library

task 'To be a light in the darkness through song and speech'.<sup>144</sup> Naturally, he will not stoop to the behaviour of the three mockers. All four of them say they want to dedicate themselves to the convalescence of the vernacular literary tradition. How rich it is becomes apparent from a second recital, much more elaborate than the first, of classical, foreign, and Dutch poets. It is interesting to note that Celosse, just as De Castelein, situates the origin of some rhetoricians' genres in antiquity. So Vergil is said to have introduced the refrain, and Martial the ballad.<sup>145</sup> The rondeau, too, is of classical origin. Then follows the list of poets. On the side of the Dutch ('Belgica') now also names of Northern Netherlanders are mentioned.<sup>146</sup> They form the seed from which new poets will spring.

To be clear, Dutch poetry was, according to Celosse, a form of rhetoric and had a long, respectable history, with synchronic and diachronic connections to respectively foreign and classical literature. Thijs's analyses of the literary notions behind the *Helicon* confirm this double orientation for the anthology as a whole. For the anthologists and the contributors it was about poetry as well as rhetoric.<sup>147</sup> The *Helicon* could most certainly be climbed in Holland. The rhetoricians, too, could do this, without renouncing their literary roots.

The *Veldt-dichtsche T'saemspraeck* by Jasper Bernaerds takes place between two allegorical personages: Art-Practitioner (Konst-oeffenaer) and Art-Lover (Konst-beminder). They discuss the condition of Dutch poetry. Now, people also want to build a *Helicon* here – the terms *Belgica* and *Nederlandt* are mentioned.<sup>148</sup> Just as in Celosse's play, a survey of poets from Greek, Latin, and vernacular (foreign and Dutch) antiquity follows, even longer than in the preceding text.<sup>149</sup> A torrent comes out, where Latin and vernacular poets are mentioned together. The Dutch list reaches from the fifteenth-century rhetorician Anthonis de Roovere (c. 1432–1482) to Coornhert and Hooft. Thus, what

<sup>144</sup> *Helicon* 35: 'Met sangh end' spraek te zijn in duysterheyt een licht'.

<sup>145</sup> *Helicon* 41.

<sup>146</sup> It concerns (again in order of their listing in the book) Matthijs de Castelein, Jan Baptist Houwaert, Jan van der Noot, Johan Fruytiers (d. before 1582), Marcus van Vaernewyck, Cornelis van Ghiste, Jeronimus van der Voort, Daniël Heinsius, Jan van den Dale, Abraham van der Mijl (1563–1637), Pieter van der Mersch (1545/46–1629), Michael Neander (1525–1595), Cornelis Taemisz. (1567–1600), Jacob Duym (1546–c. 1623), Jan van Hout, and Karel van Mander (*Helicon* 42).

<sup>147</sup> Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 120–132.

<sup>148</sup> *Helicon* 68–69.

<sup>149</sup> *Helicon* 70–74.

some contemporaries then (and most literary historians now) separate is here explicitly brought together by Bernaerds. He also answers the criticism on poets that were said to discredit the art. His retort may even be more convincing than De Heere's: will, on account of the scrooge, the lecher, and the drunkard, perhaps the money, the women, and the wine be condemned?<sup>150</sup>

In this contribution, too, is spoken of the content of the poets' trade, 'the rhetorician's office' ('Redenrijckers ampt'). The vernacular, national dimension is evident. One writes verse in Dutch, for it is not for nothing that one speaks of a 'school of the nation's language' ('Gemeene lants-tael schole') in regard to a chamber of rhetoric. And their activities are called 'Country-benefit-Art' ('Landt-nut-Konst'). One had to 'combine purpose with joy' ('Nut minghen onder vreught').<sup>151</sup> Without knowing it, the rhetoricians had all along employed the Horatian dictum 'utile dulci'. Now they could refer to it in confirmation of their classical roots. Art-Practitioner says he could name many more poets. Art-Lover is even more definite: travel through the rest of the Netherlands and go past all the bookshops and bookstands, and one will find the works of even more poets.<sup>152</sup>

### *Vlaerdings Redenrijck-bergh*

Among the contributors to *Den Nederduytschen Helicon* were also Janus Dousa (1545–1604) and Daniël Heinsius (1580–1655), two scholarly residents of Leiden with a strict classicistic orientation. Both belonged to the cycle of learned friends – mainly professors at Leiden University – around Jan van Hout. Thijs is of the opinion that their ideas about literature did not actually differ so much from those of the other participants.<sup>153</sup> Yet Heinsius's poetry and the notions that underlay it became the main issue of a poetical debate, which on the rhetoricians' side was lead by Job van de Wael. In 1616, Van de Wael organised in his hometown of Vlaardingén a large theatre and poetry competition, whose overarching theme was the tension between unity and disunity during the Twelve Years' Truce. The contributions of the

<sup>150</sup> *Helicon* 75.

<sup>151</sup> *Helicon* 76.

<sup>152</sup> *Helicon* 76–77.

<sup>153</sup> Thijs B., *Hoefslag* 39–41, 131.

participating chambers of rhetoric, all from Holland, were published that very same year by the Amsterdam printer Cornelis Fransz. under the title *Vlaerdings Redenrijck-bergh* (fig. 8).

In his welcome play, Van de Wael responds to the preface that Haarlem scholar Petrus Scriverius (1576–1660) wrote for the edition, also from 1616, of Heinsius's *Nederduytsche Poemata*.<sup>154</sup> In it, he sketches the ideal profile of the true poet, that of the *poeta doctus*, the scholarly author, who imitated and emulated the shape and content of Latin literature in pure Dutch. Such a person was humanistically schooled and knew his classics.<sup>155</sup> Heinsius was an excellent example of such a poet: he impeccably imitated literature from Roman antiquity in Latin as well as in Dutch. Those who did not do this were, according to Scriverius, the rhetoricians. In his second, rhymed dedication of Heinsius's work, Scriverius calls them noise-makers. They do not know how to write a tragedy, for they are incapable of striking a balanced tone. It is no wonder, either: they were uncultured and unschooled, in all respects the antipole of the intellectual and social elite to which he himself and Heinsius belonged. Scriverius makes an exception for Amsterdam, where, under the leadership of Hooft – to whom he alludes – the classical genres are practised in pure Dutch. Here, a hopeful start is made with the classicistic art of poetry.<sup>156</sup> So, according to Scriverius, the Helicon is found not only in Leiden, where Heinsius is setting the right example, but also in Amsterdam.

Van de Wael takes offence at Scriverius's words and in his welcome play subtly lectures him. He contends that rhetoricians can just as rightfully claim the Parnassus for themselves as poets of a more classicistic make. The Parnassus is there, he says, where inspired

<sup>154</sup> This paragraph is based on Ramakers B., "'s Lands wijs, 's lands eer. Vorm en inhoud van de Vlaardingse spelen van 1616", in Ramakers B., et al., *Op de Hollandse Parnas. De Vlaardingse rederijkerswedstrijd van 1616* (Zwolle: 2006) 65–125, esp. 65–74.

<sup>155</sup> Smits-Veldt M.B., "Hollandse rederijkers in hun strijd om een plaats op de Parnassus", in Duits H. – Strien H. van (eds.), *'De rhetorijcke in vele manieren'. Lezingen bij het afscheid van Marijke Spies als hoogleraar Oudere Nederlandse Letterkunde aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam*, special issue *Spiegel der Letteren* 43, 3 (2001) 234–247; Wael Job van de, *Wellekoomspel voor de rederijkersintrede te Vlaardingen in 1616*, ed. Bromberg R.L.J., *Zwolse Drukken en Herdrukken voor de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde te Leiden* 59 (Zwolle: 1967) 7–34; Rank L.Ph. – Warners J.D.P. – Zwaan F.L. (eds.), *Bacchus en Christus. Twee Lofzangen van Daniel Heinsius, Zwolse Drukken en Herdrukken voor de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde te Leiden* 53 (Zwolle: 1965) 14–16.

<sup>156</sup> Rank L.Ph. – Warners J.D.P. – Zwaan F.L., *Bacchus en Christus* 88–89, ll. 111–114.



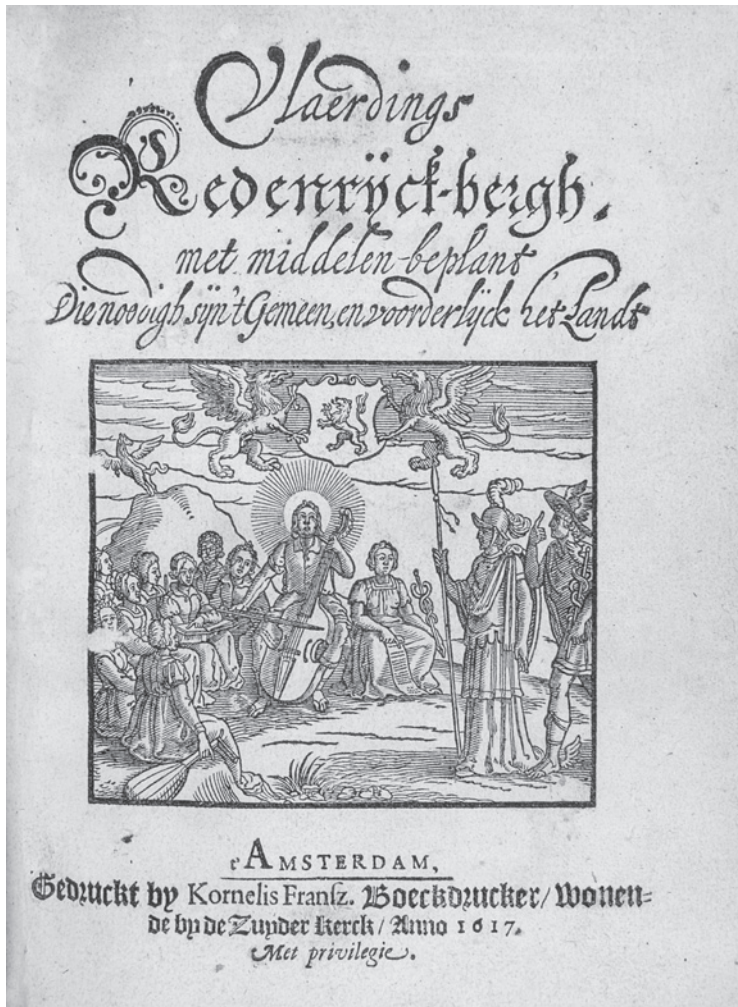


Fig. 8. *Vlaerdings Redenrijck-bergh* (Amsterdam, Kornelis Franz., 1617) title page, Dordrechts Museum – Huis van Gijn

rhetoricians gather to practise the art of poetry. This is what the title *Vlaerdings Redenrijck-bergh* denotes: that the Parnassus of Holland for the duration of the competition was located in Vlaardingen. In the play, the poets' mountain was also shown in a tableau vivant. It consisted of three levels. At the top, Rhetoric (Redenrijck) was throned as the personification of poetry. On the second plane was the virgin or maiden of the chamber. Below her, finally, sat Virtue (Deuchde), Joy (Vreuchde), and Knowledge (Kennis). The last looked like Minerva.

The welcome play opens with a long soliloquy by Rhetoric, who describes how, as a consequence of the Truce, Minerva and Apollo have appeared again. Art and scholarship have started to flourish because of it.<sup>157</sup> She sees it as a positive development: the people yearn for knowledge and joyfully give expression to it in art. They drink again from the Hippocrene, the place on the Helicon where Pegasus created a fountain with his hooves. Whoever drank from it became an artist. Minerva and Pegasus are also depicted on the title page of *Vlaerdings Redenrijck-bergh*, including Rhetoric, Mercury, Apollo, and the Muses (fig. 8).<sup>158</sup> After Rhetoric's soliloquy, Virtue, Joy, and Knowledge emphasise how much these elements are united in the true art of poetry.

While Scriverius disposes of the revived activity among rhetoricians during the Truce as noise-making, Van de Wael presents it as essential. Rhetoricians certainly are practitioners of the true art of poetry and command exactly those qualities – knowledge and virtue – that Scriverius denies them. Van de Wael also claims the legitimation for this form of artistry in the fact that it is conducted partly on the initiative of the municipal government and for the benefit of the commonwealth. He emphasises the social function of the rhetoricians' poetry.<sup>159</sup> Cornelis Fransz. does the same in his dedicatory letter. One can call her 'Poetry' ('Poësie') or the 'Art of Rhyme or Verse' ('Rijm ofte Dichtkonst'), but better yet is the 'Art of Rhetoric' ('Reden-rijck-konst'). It is not just a profitable art, but also an indispensable one – a science even – that one, if in possession of talent, must cultivate for the benefit of his fellow citizens and descendants. The chambers of rhetoric serve

<sup>157</sup> Wael J.A. van de, *Wellekoomspel* 41, ll. 135–138.

<sup>158</sup> Bleyerveld Y., "Het bezoek van inerva en Mercurius aan Apollo en de Muzen. De houtsneede op de titelpagina van *Vlaerdings Redenrijck-bergh*", in Ramakers B. et al., *Op de Hollandse Parnas. De Vlaardingse rederijkerswedstrijd van 1616* (Zwolle: 2006) 195–197, fig. 139.

<sup>159</sup> Smits-Veldt M.B., "Hollandse rederijkers" 236.

this cultivation. With this same purpose, the rhetoricians have assembled in Vlaardingen and three relevant questions have been presented to them (each to be answered in a different poetic genre).

Literary historians see in the welcome play an attempt by Van de Wael to receive recognition from his Leiden critics as a classicistic poet. He and the participants in the Vlaardingen competition would claim a place on the Parnassus, which apparently was already occupied by others.<sup>160</sup> With subtle variations on lines by Heinsius and Scriverius, incorporating mythological imagery and learned thoughts, Van de Wael is said to have wanted to follow in both these masters' footsteps.<sup>161</sup> With the writing of alexandrines his purpose would have been to distinguish himself from other rhetoricians.<sup>162</sup> Such interpretations carry things much too far and underestimate the self-aware character of the man and his fellow artists who participated in the competition. They were not against knowledge, not against that of antiquity either – on the contrary. Most authors made a show of it in their plays. They also had nothing against metrical verse, which they, unasked, even employed rather generally in their contributions to the competition.<sup>163</sup> It was not that difficult to become a learned poet. What one lacked in talent, was compensated for in diligent (self-)tuition and a lot of practice – exactly the objectives served by the chambers of rhetoric.<sup>164</sup> After all, according to the rhetoricians, rhetoric and poetry, *ars* and *ingenium*, lay close together.

The opening and final scenes of the welcome play, in which rhetoric is defended, frame one large middle scene in which the familiar criticism of the rhetoricians is satirically criticised. The scenes involve a conversation between Midas, Momus, and Pan. Midas stands for erroneous judgments, Momus for captiousness and unreasonable criticism, and Pan for substandard peasant poetry. Together they criticise the rhetoricians. For the contemporary audience it must have been obvious from the beginning that what the three characters say should not be taken seriously. This is made even more evident by Van de

<sup>160</sup> Smits-Veldt M.B., "Hollandse rederijkers" 236–237.

<sup>161</sup> Wael J.A. van de, *Wellekoomspel* 18; Smits-Veldt M.B., "Hollandse rederijkers" 236.

<sup>162</sup> Wael J.A. van de, *Wellekoomspel* 17–18.

<sup>163</sup> Smits-Veldt M.B., "Hollandse rederijkers" 241.

<sup>164</sup> Dixhoorn A. van, "Liefhebbers van de redekunst. De Vlaardingse rederijkerwedstrijd van 1616 en de principes van het Hollandse rederijkersleven", in Ramakers B. et al., *Op de Hollandse Parnas. De Vlaardingse rederijkerswedstrijd van 1616* (Zwolle: 2006) 11–29.

Wael's decision to have all three of them speak in a peasant fashion. When we examine the criticism, it emerges that it originates from the conservative rhetoricians' corner, from those who want to stop literary renewal, and from those who thought that rhetoricians did not have much success in this renewal. Pan belongs in the one quarter, Momus – in whom one is inclined to recognise Scriverius – in the other. After all, it was Scriverius who reproached the rhetoricians with lack of knowledge. Against both groups, conservatives within and progressives outside the rhetoricians' circle, Van de Wael comically makes a stand, by parodying their derision of the rhetoricians.

This way, the texts in *Vlaerdings Redenrijck-bergh* also implicitly criticise the exclusivity existing around the literature of authors like Heinsius and Scriverius and propagate the poetical stand of the rhetoricians. The fact that Van de Wael's 'ability to write verse' 'unfortunately' cannot match 'that of the leading Amsterdam poets',<sup>165</sup> only underlines this view. This imperfection may have palled on the literary vanguard then and may disappoint literary historians now, but the participants in the Vlaardingen competition most likely did not have such strong feelings about it. The inclusivity of their poetical views relate to the practice as well as the reception of poetry. Literature had to be accessible to a broad audience. This is why most authors, with all readiness to write metrical verse, held to the allegorical *spel van sinne*. This turned out to be a 'tenacious form',<sup>166</sup> but not because of the rhetoricians' incapability to practise classical theatre genres, but because of their conviction that for competitions like the Vlaardingen one, the *spel van sinne* was the most suitable play genre, namely, that through which poetry could fulfill her public function. There existed a great need for this during the Twelve Years' Truce.

In the 'Description' ('Beschryvinge') of the competition, which Van de Wael undoubtedly formulated himself, he calls on his fellow artists to follow the vernacular tradition:

Rhyme in nothing but *Plain Dutch*. Spell *Terms* and *Words*,  
Too, after the Country's habit; for Country's way is Country's honour.  
Do not bend a *Sentence* for the sake of *Metre* or *Rhyme*.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>165</sup> Smits-Veldt M.B., "Hollandse rederijkers" 237.

<sup>166</sup> Smits-Veldt M.B., "Hollandse rederijkers" 238.

<sup>167</sup> *Vlaerdings Redenrijck-bergh* [...] (Amsterdam: Cornelis Fransz, 1617), fol. b3<sup>v</sup>: 'Niet dan *Plat Neerlandtsch* rijmt. *Begrypen* ende *Woorden* / Oock na Lants wyse stelt;

It was all well and good, this classicism, but the clarity of the message should not suffer under it. Moreover, the holding on to the vernacular poetic tradition – ‘the Country’s way’ – undeniably was something humanistic. No one had to be ashamed of that.

### Conclusion

What in professional literature is generally referred to as Renaissance theatre did not in a revolutionary way turn against rhetoricians’ theatre. It was a matter of a ‘natural transition’<sup>168</sup> that was not so evolutionary that playwrights became decreasingly oriented as rhetoricians and increasingly oriented as classicists. Early seventeenth-century authors ‘without scruples blend rhetoricians’ and Renaissance elements in practically all their plays’ – also in their contributions to the Vlaardingen competition.<sup>169</sup> These confirm a picture which has been sketched already: for rhetoricians’ plays that dramatised historical subjects, the classicistic theatre offered an alternative, but for the type of theatre that the rhetoricians practised the most, the argumentative *spel van sinne* – in which, through personifications, lines of reasoning were acted out and explained – the classicistic theatre was not adequate. It was in such explicative plays that the rhetoricians could optimally realise their poetics with regard to drama. In the use of this genre the inclusive character of their culture becomes abundantly clear.

At long last, the rhetoricians’ poetics, together with their literature, would be marginalised. The same happened to their organisations, the chambers of rhetoric. Surveying the history of their literature and culture, it is striking for how long and to what degree they proved to be capable of anticipating changing circumstances of an intellectual and artistic as well as a political and religious nature. Here, we have only pursued the poetical views that were connected to a growing vernacular self-awareness. The latter proved to be already strongly developed among

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want Landts wys’ is Landts eer. / Om *Mate* noch om *Dicht* en wilt gheen *Zin* vermoorden’.

<sup>168</sup> Meeus H., “Verschillen in structuur en dramaturgie tussen het rederijkerstoneel en het vroege renaissancedrama. Poging tot het schetsen van een ontwikkeling”, in Ramakers B.A.M. (ed.), *Spel in de verte. Tekst, structuur en opvoeringspraktijk van het rederijkerstoneel, Jaarboek Koninklijke Soevereine Hoofdkamer “De Fonteyne” te Gent* 41–42 (1991–1992) (Ghent: 1994) 97–118, esp. 98.

<sup>169</sup> Meeus H., “Verschillen” 100.

rhetoricians around the middle of the sixteenth century, partly under the influence of the introduction to classical literature and to foreign literature in which this classical literature had already left its mark.

The confrontation with the foreign caused a strong awareness of individuality and vernacular tradition to arise. Rhetoricians' literature was not only Netherlandish, it was also ancient and had roots that reached into the early fifteenth century. The mother tongue and its old literature belonged to the poet's nature. They were inherent to him. He could improve them with the help of the classics, without having to renounce them. After all, both his native language and his native literature in a way were classical too. Learning the rules of his native language and imitating good examples from his native literature was not unbefitting a poet. Neither was the studying of and following of actual classical (Greek or Latin) literature. Did not contemporary painters also blend vernacular and foreign motifs? And was imitating among visual artists not also a completely normal affair? From the classics, rhetoricians learned further that the art they practised was called poetry, but that they could assuredly continue to call it rhetoric. The Helicon (or Parnassus) was, after all, not only home to Apollo, but also to Mercury. Because of the close ties between rhetoricians and visual artists, who, in thinking about their art, likewise appealed to rhetoric, it was not at all obvious for rhetoricians to let go of their orientation on rhetoric. This way, the practice of poetry as an art that could be acquired remained.



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## FRANS HALS AND THE VERNACULAR\*

David A. Levine

Frans Hals (ca. 1582/83–1666), the celebrated Haarlem portrait and genre painter, practiced a method of brushwork sharply at odds with previous Dutch tradition.<sup>1</sup> With rare exception, earlier painters in the Low Countries had used painstaking blending and glazing techniques to disguise the activity of their brushes. Inverting this venerable aesthetic, Hals often permitted concise, brusque strokes to remain conspicuously legible on his panels, coppers, and canvases. Indeed, these marks, laid down with apparent swiftness and surety, maintain their eloquence as independent forms even as they contribute to creating convincing illusions of the whole. This exceptional handling of paint, arguably more than any other factor, endows Hals's pictures with their unique character. It both distinguishes them visually from earlier works of art, and imbues them with a level of naturalism, emotional appeal, and persuasiveness unsurpassed in their time.

Hals applied his unusual brush technique emphatically in his pictures of contemporary Dutch social life produced during the early decades of his career. The artist's *Merrymakers at Shrovetide* of ca. 1616–1617 [Fig. 1],<sup>2</sup> for example, a send-up of the excesses of the Lenten carnival,

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<sup>1</sup> On the character of Hals's brushwork, see Trivas N.S., *The Paintings of Frans Hals* (London-New York: 1941) 12–13; Slive S., *Frans Hals*, 3 vols (New York-London: 1970–1974) I, 106–07; Grimm C., *Frans Hals: The Complete Work*, tr. Riehle J. (New York: 1990) 9–10, 69–70, 85–87; Slive S. (ed.), *Frans Hals*, exh. cat., (London: 1989) 15; and Atkins C., “Frans Hals's Virtuoso Brushwork,” in Jon J. de – Meijers D. – Westermann M. – Woodall J. (eds.), *Virtus. Virtuosititeit en kunstliefhebbers in de Nederlanden 1500–1700*, *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 54 (Zwolle, 2004) 281–307. For a technical examination of Hals's painting methods see Groen K. – Hendriks E., ‘Frans Hals: A Technical Examination’, in Slive (ed.) *Frans Hals* 109–123.

<sup>2</sup> Slive S., *Frans Hals* I, 33–37; III, 3–4, no. 5. For a recent analysis of this canvas with extensive bibliography, see Liedtke W., *Dutch Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: 2007) I, 251–259.



Fig. 1. Frans Hals, *Merry-makers at Shrovetide* (ca. 1616–1617). Oil on canvas, 131.4 × 99.7 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913 (14.40.605). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

abounds in faces, hands, and fabrics finished with unblended, concise blotches of red, brown, black, and white oil paint [Fig. 2], each one of them uniquely shaped and endowed with a character of its own. As much as these vigorous marks converge to form naturalistic images of people and objects, they remain aloof and independent, imparting exceptional energy and persuasive thrust to the scene. Similar dynamic brushwork energizes the painter's so-called *Merry Drinker* of ca. 1628–1630 [Fig. 3].<sup>3</sup> Here, curt fragments of ocher and white on the face and extended arm [Fig. 4] assemble to form a convincing image of a figure in agitated motion. Yet each one of those constituent parts maintains a unique appearance and demands appreciation as a minor visual statement in itself. Suggestive of rapid-fire execution, the application of the paint contributes mightily to the unbridled vivacity and dynamism of the image.

Terse, independent strokes also grace many of Hals's portraits depicting the citizenry of seventeenth-century Holland. The painter's witty likeness of a corpulent fellow thought to represent the Haarlem brewer Nicolaes Pietersz. Duyt van Voorhout [Fig. 5] is a case in point.<sup>4</sup> Probably executed sometime between 1636 and 1638, the work features myriad short fragments that deftly assemble to form the figure's face, breast, and sleeve [Fig. 6]. The brusque strokes provide the picture with a degree of vibrancy and expressive power all but unknown in the portraits of other early modern masters. By imparting to the client an air of irrepressible exuberance, Hals's method of paint application notably undercuts those notions of patrician social decorum upheld in conventional Renaissance and Baroque portraiture.<sup>5</sup> Yet the artist's abrupt marks seem to assert alternative values such as frankness, unpretentiousness, and buoyant energy as virtues on a par with controlled aristocratic bearing.

<sup>3</sup> Slive S., *Frans Hals* I, 110–111; III, 38–39, no. 63. Slive S., *Dutch Painting 1600–1800* (New Haven-London, 1995) 38–42 offers a vivid description and analysis of Hals's technique.

<sup>4</sup> Slive S., *Frans Hals* I, 86–88, 122–123; III, 63–64, no. 119; Liedtke, *Dutch Paintings* I, 285–288.

<sup>5</sup> For considerations of Renaissance portraiture, see Cranston J., *The Poetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge-New York: 2000); Rogers M. (ed.), *Fashioning Identities in Renaissance Art* (Aldershot, Eng.-Brookfield, Vermont: 2000); Woodall J. (ed.), *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (Manchester-New York: 1997).



Fig. 2. Frans Hals, *Merrymakers at Shrovetide* (ca. 1616–1617). Oil on canvas, 131.4 × 99.7 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913 (14.40.605). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Detail, face of figure on left

What led Hals to paint in that fractured and abbreviated, yet highly persuasive, manner of his? And, for that matter, why was his style accepted, if not demanded, by eager patrons in Haarlem and elsewhere in Holland? Scholars of Dutch art have historically sidestepped these vexing questions, preferring to regard Hals's anomalous handling of paint and its early appreciation essentially as matters of personal preference.<sup>6</sup> In a recent focused study, however, Christopher Atkins has approached them directly, finding answers in the realm of art theory.<sup>7</sup> Atkins argues

<sup>6</sup> Grimm, *Hals* 85, maintains that the origins of Hals's handling of paint lie in the styles of earlier Haarlem painters such as Cornelis Cornelisz. Cf. Slive (ed.), *Frans Hals* 15, who concludes that 'the search for sources [of Hals's technique] by earlier and more recent students has been fruitless'.

<sup>7</sup> Atkins, "Hals's Brushwork" 281–307.





Fig. 3. Frans Hals, *The Merry Drinker* (ca. 1628–1630). Oil on canvas, 81 × 66.5 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum. Image Collection Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Fig. 4. Frans Hals, *The Merry Drinker* (ca. 1628–1630). Oil on canvas, 81 × 66.5 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum. Detail of arm and glass. Image Collection Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam





Fig. 5. Frans Hals, *Portrait of a Man, possibly Nicolaes Pietersz. Duyst van Voorhout* (ca. 1636–1638). Oil on canvas, 80.6 × 66 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Jules Bache Collection, 1949 (49.7.33). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Fig. 6. Frans Hals, *Portrait of a Man, possibly Nicolaes Pietersz. Duyst van Voorhout* (ca. 1636–1638). Oil on canvas, 80.6 × 66 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Jules Bache Collection, 1949 (49.7.33). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Detail of sleeve

that contemporary appreciation of Hals rested upon the painter's brushwork having been widely regarded as 'virtuosic', that is, highly skilled and self-consciously artful. He points out that Dutch and Flemish writers on art active during the seventeenth century such as Karel van Mander (1548–1606), Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627–1678), and Cornelis de Bie (1627–ca. 1715) distinguished a sketchy method of painting, the 'rough' (*rouw*) style, which they regarded as existing in opposition to the preferred 'neat' (*net*) manner.<sup>8</sup> In the category

<sup>8</sup> Atkins, "Hals's Brushwork" esp. 283–292. On the *rouw* style, which has more often been associated with Rembrandt's handling of brush and pen, see Emmens J., "Natuur, onderwijzing en oefening", in Bruyn J. et al. (eds.) *Album Amicorum Discipulorum J.G. Van Gelder* (Utrecht: 1963) 125–136; Alpers S., *Rembrandt's Enterprise* (Chicago: 1988) 16–18; Wetering E. van de., *Rembrandt: The Master and His Workshop: Paintings*, exh. cat. (Berlin-London: 1991) 16–22; Courtright N., "Origins and Meaning of Rembrandt's Late Drawing Style", *The Art Bulletin* 78 (1996) 485–510;

of *rouw* they placed the works of Titian and other highly esteemed painters whose visible strokes displayed their creative prowess. Contemporary Dutch audiences, Atkins avers, regarded Hals's pictures as belonging to this distinctive rough type. Their perception of its lofty lineage legitimized Hals's characteristic brushwork in their eyes, and accounted for its popularity.<sup>9</sup> Atkins stops short of claiming that Hals painted in his chosen manner deliberately to reference the *rouw* style. He does, however, leave the door ajar to such a conclusion.<sup>10</sup>

Without taking issue with Atkins's argument, I would like here to propose an expanded account of Hals's novel handling of paint, one that directly addresses the political and social context in which Hals's brushwork arose. It is as follows: that Hals's premier innovation in painting style may be understood as part of a larger effort initiated by patriotic Hollanders of the period to establish a positive cultural identity for the newly independent Dutch state. This paper examines the potential relevance for Hals of one facet of that fluid yet far-reaching corporate endeavor: the attempt made by Dutch linguists of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to glorify the Dutch mother tongue. It points out notable structural correspondences between the native vernacular as described by its early modern Dutch defenders and Hals's play of the brush. These connections may enable us to appreciate better the distinctive nature of Hals's rough style of painting – the quality that distinguishes it from the handling of Titian and other virtuosi – and the particular attraction it held for contemporary partisan Dutchmen.

Before moving ahead, however, I would like to acknowledge the methodological complexity of my enterprise, and offer some rationale for proceeding along the lines that I have proposed. Any study attempting to connect painting with language must confront the problem

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and Schnackenburg B., "Young Rembrandt's 'Rough Manner': A Painting Style and Its Sources", in Wetering E. van de – Schnackenburg B. (eds.), *The Mystery of the Young Rembrandt*, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: 2001) 92–121. On the place of loose brushwork and 'painterly' painting in Italian art theory, see Sohm P., *Pittoresco: Marco Boschini, His Critics, and Their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-century Italy* (Cambridge: 1991).

<sup>9</sup> Ben Broos had earlier connected Hals's handling of paint with the concept of *rouw* brushwork: see Broos's untitled review of *Frans Hals* by Seymour Slive in *Simiolus* 10, 2 (1978–1979) 122.

<sup>10</sup> 'Hals's paintings suggest that he may have responded to the general appreciation of rough handling,' Atkins, "Hals's Brushwork" 301.

that the two arts under scrutiny lack equivalence.<sup>11</sup> Painting and verbal expression may be analogous in some respects, but in other ways those sister arts seem estranged. *Imago*- and *logo*-centric modes of expression possess distinctive sets of attributes, demands, and rules that, from certain perspectives at the very least, are not transferable. How then can a comparison between the handling of the brush and linguistic formation yield meaningful results?

The scholarship of semiotics has much to offer in response to the question above. In making their case that all forms of social endeavor may be reduced to equivalent constituent parts, and compared thereby, sign theorists have long noted the possibility of regarding words as the structural equivalents of brushstrokes. The art historian Meyer Schapiro was one of the first to draw attention to this prospect. Writing in 1969, Schapiro noted that in Impressionist landscape painting, 'flecks without clear resemblance in shape or color' to the object represented – a tree was Schapiro's example – 'approach a feature of verbal signs'.<sup>12</sup> Other art historians engaging the tools of semiotics have since generalized the point. Seeking a parallel in painting for the phoneme, the ostensible minimal unit of language, Wendy Steiner determined 'the most obvious possibility [is] the brush stroke'.<sup>13</sup> Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson called attention to the same theoretical correspondence, observing that 'below a certain threshold, perhaps roughly corresponding to phonetics in language, there are marks [in painting] that contribute to [...] signification – individual brushstrokes'.<sup>14</sup> The present investigation, which, as we shall see, proposes an inter-artistic correlation

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<sup>11</sup> For extended discussions of this matter, see Baxandall M., "The Language of Art History", *New Literary History* 10 (1979) 453–465; and Summers D., "Conditions and Conventions: On the Disanalogy of Art and Language", in Kemal S. – Gaskell I. (eds.), *The Language of Art History* (Cambridge: 1991) 181–212.

<sup>12</sup> Schapiro M., "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs", *Simiolus* 6 (1972–1973) 18 (first published in *Semiotica* 1 [1969] 223–242).

<sup>13</sup> Steiner W., *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Painting* (Chicago: 1982) 51. Steiner is quick to acknowledge, however, that, 'artists are free to choose whether their part-whole relations will be "linguistic" in this way or not'.

<sup>14</sup> Bal M. – Bryson N., "Semiotics and Art History", *The Art Bulletin* 73 (1991) 194. On the structural relationship between painting and language more generally, see Mitchell W.J.T., *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: 1994); Mitchell W.J.T., *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: 1986) esp. 47–149; and Goodman N., *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: 1976).

between Hals's brushstrokes and monosyllabic Dutch words, receives some measure of theoretical validation from this avenue of thought.

Supportive as well is an established historical factor: creative thinkers of Hals's era were generally less troubled by the ultimate incommensurability of painting and language than we are today. Schooled in the ideology of *ut pictura poesis*, they habitually sought to uncover extended connections between painting and the other arts.<sup>15</sup> Such yearning provoked Johannes Goropius Becanus (1519–1572), a Dutch physician, humanist, and linguist who figures in the story ahead, to compare the creator of language to the painter who produces images by means of color and line, observing that both inventors evoke the matter represented in the mind of the spectator.<sup>16</sup> The following analysis leans upon the possibility of this analogy. It is buttressed as well by modern scholarship linking developments in Dutch painting at the dawn of the Golden Age with concurrent changes in the status of the Dutch language.<sup>17</sup>

During the bloody war of independence against Spain that led to the foundation of the autonomous Dutch Republic, a fundamental shift occurred in the way that thinkers conceived of Dutch culture.<sup>18</sup> In earlier times, elites both within and outside the Netherlands had tended to deride local Dutch ways, insofar as they considered them

<sup>15</sup> Lee R.W., *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (New York: 1967) remains the classic scholarly explication of this idea.

<sup>16</sup> Goropius Becanus Johannes, *Opera, Hactenus in lucem non edita: nempe, Hermathena...* (Antwerp, Christophe Plantin: 1580) 21; cited by Krop H.A., "The Antiquity of the Dutch Language: Renaissance Theories on the Language of Paradise", in Fenoulhet J. – Gilbert L. (eds.), *Presenting the Past: History, Art, Language* (London: 1996) 214–215.

<sup>17</sup> Alpers S., "Realism as a Comic Mode: Low-Life Painting Seen Through Bredero's Eyes", *Simiolus* 8 (1975–76) 116–120; Bruyn J., "A Turning-Point in the History of Dutch Art", in Luijten G. et al. (eds.), *Dawn of the Golden Age: Northern Netherlands Art 1580–1620*, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: 1993) 120–121; and Westermann M., "Local Color: Painting and Proto-National Awareness in the Dutch Republic", in Kofuku A. (ed.), *Dutch Art from the Rijksmuseum*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: 2000) 238–240.

<sup>18</sup> Branden L. van den, *Het Streven naar verheerlijking, zuivering en opbouw van het nederlands in de 16de eeuw*, Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal-en Letterkunde, 6, 77 (Ghent: 1956) remains fundamental to reconstructing this development. Aspects of the changing Dutch self-image during the early modern period are treated in Briels J.G.C.A., "Brabantse blaaskaak en Hollandse botmuil: Cultuurontwikkelingen in Holland in het begin van de Gouden Eeuw", *De Zeventiende eeuw* 1 (1985) 12–36; and Porteman K., "The Idea of Being a Dutchman: Normative Self-Reflection in Early 17th-Century Amsterdam", in Shetter W.S. – Cruysse I. van der (eds.) *Contemporary Explorations in the Culture of the Low Countries* (Lanham, MD: 1996) 231–247.



at all. Praiseworthy culture for them existed mainly on foreign soil, in Mediterranean lands whose values they believed to have descended, unlike their own, directly from classical antiquity. As the northern Netherlands approached independence and statehood toward the close of the sixteenth century, however, a growing body of the region's intellectuals engaged in identifying allegedly unique characteristics of their own people and social structures, and in defending those features in their writings. Those efforts arose in part within the context of the pan-European tradition of humanistic inquiry that came to fruition in the sixteenth century. Indeed, its architects were, on the whole, classically trained scholars committed to furthering their academic disciplines and intellectual interests. Yet the phenomenon under consideration also had a powerful political dimension. Beyond the objective recovery and analysis of facts, it aimed to provide the region and its diverse population a sense of shared identity and union, and a positive self-image essential to the success of the new state.

One feature of Dutch civilization to come under such scrutiny and reevaluation during the years surrounding the war of independence was the status and character of the Dutch language.<sup>19</sup> *Duyts* (or *Duits*, *Duytsch*, *Nederduyts*), as Netherlanders then called their mother tongue, much earlier had achieved standing as a business and administrative language, employed frequently in extra-literary documents such as charters and chronicles.<sup>20</sup> From the fifteenth century onward,

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<sup>19</sup> Recent examinations include Wal M. van der – Bree C. van, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlands* (Utrecht: 1992); Vries J.W. de – Willemyns R. – Burger P., *Het verhaal van een taal: negen eeuwen Nederlands* (Amsterdam: 1993); Wal M.J. van der, *De Moedertaal centraal: standaardisatie-aspecten in de Nederlanden omstreeks 1650* (The Hague: 1995); Toorn M.C. van den, et al., *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse taal* (Amsterdam: 1997); Sijs N. van der, *Taal als mensenwerk: het ontstaan van het ABN* (The Hague: 2004). Vooys C.G.N. de, *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse taal in hoofdtrekken geschetst*, 3rd ed. (Antwerp-Groningen: 1943) and Zwaan F.L., *Uit de geschiedenis der Nederlandsche spraakkunst* (Groningen: 1939) remain essential sources. Useful general surveys in English include Donaldson B.C., *Dutch: A Linguistic History of Holland and Belgium* (Leiden: 1983), and Brachin P., *The Dutch Language* (Leiden: 1985). See also Burke P., *Towards a Social History of Early Modern Dutch* (Amsterdam: 2005).

<sup>20</sup> Brachin, *Dutch Language* 11; Donaldson, *Dutch* 96; and Burke, *Early Modern Dutch* 14. Howell R.B., "The Low Countries: A Study in Sharply Contrasting Nationalisms", in Barbour S. – Carmichael C. (eds.), *Language and Nationalism in Europe* (Oxford: 2000) 135, notes that in Holland and several locations in the southern Netherlands the transition from Latin to Dutch in official municipal documents occurred as early as the mid-thirteenth century.

farces and poems were printed in dialects of Dutch, and by the third decade of the sixteenth century, a partial translation of the Bible had appeared.<sup>21</sup>

Nonetheless, *Duyts* continued to be regarded by many educated Netherlanders and non-Netherlanders alike as a distinctly second-class means of communication. It was generally passed over by scholars and other intellectuals, and denied public acclaim both at home and abroad.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, its alleged deficiencies contributed to making Dutch the subject of criticism, and even the butt of jokes. In his *Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi* (Antwerp, 1567), the Italian writer and merchant Lodovico Guicciardini (1521–1589) notably censured Dutch for being ‘difficult to learn and even harder to speak, so that even native-born children had to grow up before they could express themselves in the language’.<sup>23</sup> Dutch chroniclers active in the later sixteenth century give the impression that such negative sentiments were widespread in educated circles.<sup>24</sup> That idea is also suggested by the currency of a notorious quip attributed to Holy Roman Emperor Charles V: ‘I speak French to men, Italian to women, Spanish to God, and *Duits* to horses’.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Brachin, *Dutch Language* 11; Donaldson, *Dutch* 99. The first translation of the Holy Scriptures into Dutch, the so-called Van Liesveldt Bible, began to appear in Antwerp in 1526.

<sup>22</sup> Vries – Willemyns – Burger, *Verhaal van een taal* 59; and Burke, *Early Modern Dutch* 15, who point out that Latin remained the language of choice for intellectuals, and maintained a firm grip at the universities. On Erasmus’s ambivalence towards his mother tongue, see Kooiman K., “Erasmus en de volkstaal”, *De Nieuwe Taalgids* 16 (1920) 161–167.

<sup>23</sup> ‘maer seer swaer om te leeren, en noch veel swaerder om uyt te spreken: soo dat de kinderen selve in het eygen landt gheboren, grootachtich moeten zijn, eer ze de tale vatten ende uyt spreken konnen’, in the early Dutch translation entitled, *Beschrivinghe van alle de Nederlanden* (Amsterdam, Willem Jansz. Blaeu: 1612) 27; cited by Wal, *Moedertaal centraal* 113, n. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Goropius Becanus Johannes, *Origines Antwerpianae, sive Cimmericorum Becce-selana novem libros complexa*... (Antwerp, Christophe Plantin: 1569) 9–10, remarks that scholars failed to appreciate Dutch because they considered it to be vulgar and undeveloped; cited in Krop, “Antiquity of Dutch” 221. In his ‘Uytspraeck vande weerdicheyt der Duytsche tael’, which prefaces his *De Beghinselen der Weeghconst* (Leiden, Christophe Plantin: 1586) Simon Stevin writes of ‘foreign despisers of the Dutch language’ (‘d’uytheemsche verachters der Dutysche spraek’) who claimed that the tongue was deficient because of their difficulty in learning it; see Dijksterhuis E.J. (ed.), *The Principal Works of Simon Stevin*, 5 vols (Amsterdam: 1955–66) I, 88.

<sup>25</sup> ‘tegen mannen Frans sprak, tegen vrouwen Italiaans, Spaans tegen God en tegen paarden Duits’; cited in Vries – Willemyns – Burger, *Verhaal van een taal* 59. For the poor reputation of the Dutch language among foreigners, especially German speakers, in the eighteenth century, see Brachin, *Dutch Language* 108.

The years surrounding Dutch independence, however, witnessed a sea change in attitude. Not only did literary figures and other intellectuals begin to publish their work in Dutch with increasing frequency, but also scholars across the Netherlands asserted the native tongue's alleged superiority in the most hyperbolic terms. In his *Origines Antwerpianae* of 1569, the aforementioned Goropius Becanus promulgated the notion that Dutch was the oldest language in the world, the tongue spoken by the inhabitants of paradise from which all other languages derived.<sup>26</sup> The evidence adduced by Becanus in support of this bold assertion – that the name *Duyts* derived from *de oudste* (the oldest) – was paper-thin.<sup>27</sup> No matter. About ten years later, the brilliant Dutch mechanical engineer and mathematician Simon Stevin (1548/49–1620) followed suit, writing a 'Discourse on the Worth of the Dutch Language' ('Uytspraeck vande weerdicheyt der Duytsche tael'), which posited a primordial golden age when nearly every European people – Italians, French and even Spanish – spoke Dutch as their common tongue.<sup>28</sup> Other Dutch intellectuals of Stevin's generation and later, including Cornelis Kiliaan (1528/29–1607), Johan Radermacher (1538–1617), Hendrik Laurensz. Spieghel (1549–1612), and even Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), asserted similar notions.<sup>29</sup> What-

<sup>26</sup> Goropius Becanus, *Origines Antwerpianae* 26–28. Goropius Becanus popularized this notion, the origins of which are traceable to the early sixteenth century; see Krop, "Antiquity of Dutch" 221, n. 2. The change in the status of Dutch relative to the sacred languages Hebrew, Greek, and Latin is addressed in Wal M.J. van der, "Early Language Typology: Attitudes towards Languages in the 16th and 17th Centuries", in Dutz K.D. – Forsgren K.-Å (eds.), *History and Rationality: The Skövde Papers in the Historiography of Linguistics* (Munster: 1995) 93–106. On Goropius Becanus's linguistic efforts generally, see Brink D., "Goropius Becanus and the Movement to Establish a Written Standard for Dutch in the 16th Century", in Fletcher W.H. (ed.), *Papers from the First Interdisciplinary Conference on Netherlandic Studies* (Lanham, MD: 1985) 79–85.

<sup>27</sup> Goropius Becanus, *Origines Antwerpianae* 460; cited in Krop, "Antiquity of Dutch" 206.

<sup>28</sup> Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 58–93, esp. 62. On Stevin's 'Discourse', see Devreese J.T. – Berghe G. vanden, *'Magic is No Magic': The Wonderful World of Simon Stevin* (Southampton-Boston: 2008) 201–221; Brink D. "The Linguistic Theories of Simon Stevin", *American Journal of Germanic Linguistics and Literatures* 1 (1989) 133–152; and Dijksterhuis (ed.), *Principal Works* I, 6–8, 44–46. On Stevin generally, see Droste F.G., *Simon Stevin: Wetenschapper in oorlogstijd 1548–1620* (Soesterberg: 2007).

<sup>29</sup> See Vries – Willemyns – Burger, *Verhaal van een taal* 63; and Dijksterhuis (ed.), *Principal Works* I, 46. The antiquity of the Dutch language is maintained in the so-called "Voorreden van den noodich ende nutticheit der Nederduytscher taelkunste" of 1568, formerly attributed to Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert (1522–1590) but now considered the work of Radermacher, which prefaces the *Twe-spraack vande Neder-*



ever else may have been their significance, these claims operated as a form of political expression, dovetailing with contemporaneous efforts made by Dutch historians and others to provide the newly independent republic with a positive cultural identity.<sup>30</sup>

To be sure, the allegations of Dutch linguistic primacy referenced above resemble arguments made by earlier non-Dutch writers contending the preeminence of their local vernaculars. In sixteenth-century Florence, for example, humanists such as Giovan Pietro Bolzani (1477–1560) and Pier Francesco Giambullari (1495–1555) insistently maintained the ancient Etruscan roots of Florentine culture and language.<sup>31</sup> Closely tied to the defense of Medici absolutism, these claims too had substantial political significance.<sup>32</sup> In this regard, the Dutch efforts were hardly unprecedented.

Yet the case made by Dutch linguistic scholars contending the superiority of *Duyts* differed tellingly from non-Dutch efforts of the kind. Dutch scholars did not engage in the kind of global idealization accorded to certain classical and Romance languages.<sup>33</sup> They did not assert, for example, that Dutch was the purest of all tongues. Nor did they insist that Dutch was more rational or more rule abiding than French and Italian, let alone Latin and Greek. On the contrary, some of them openly admitted the spelling and syntax of their language to be woefully irregular and in urgent need of reform.<sup>34</sup>

Rather than attributing normative virtues to the regional vernacular, defenses of Dutch written during the early years of the republic

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*duitsche letterkunst* of 1584. Grotius did not hold Dutch to be older than Hebrew, but regarded it as equally ancient; see Krop, “Antiquity of Dutch” 215.

<sup>30</sup> Brink, who arrived at a similar understanding, labeled those who made claims for the great ancestry of Dutch ‘language patriots’: Brink, “Linguistic Theories” 135, 147.

<sup>31</sup> On the views of Bolzani and Giambullari, see most recently Schoonhoven E., “A Literary Invention: The Etruscan Myth in Early Renaissance Florence”, *Renaissance Studies* 24 (2010) 464.

<sup>32</sup> Schoonhoven, “Literary Invention” 463–466.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Valla Lorenzo, *De lingvae latinae elegantia libri sex* (Paris, François Gryphius: 1539); Alighieri Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. Botterill S. (Cambridge, UK: 1996); Bellay Joachim du, *La deffence, et illustration de la langue françoise* (1549), ed. Monferran J.-C. (Geneva: 2001).

<sup>34</sup> Numerous treatises appeared during these same years promoting the purification and regularization of the Dutch language. For overviews, see Wal, *Moedertaal centraal* 23 ff.; Klifman H., “Dutch Language Study and the Trivium: Motives and Elaborations”, in Noordegraaf J. – Verstegh K. – Koerner K. (eds.), *The History of Linguistics in the Low Countries* (Amsterdam-Philadelphia: 1992) 64–83; and Vooy C.G.N. de, *Geschiedenis Nederlandse Taal* 60–70.

tend to credit the language with possessing heretofore unheralded qualities that nonetheless demonstrate its superior standing. Simon Stevin's 'Discourse on the Worth of the Dutch Language', which we will now examine in some detail, epitomizes this aspect of the genre. Stevin maintains that the greatness of Dutch rests in large part upon the language's *beweeghlicheyd*, its vehement emotional appeal (emotive force, power to move).<sup>35</sup> Why, he asks, do Dutch parishioners become more engrossed in the sermons of their preachers than worshippers in other lands? It is 'the emotional appeal of the Dutch words, which cause men's minds and hearts to be persuaded by the orator's intentions much more vehemently than any other [tongue].'<sup>36</sup>

Stevin goes on to warn that the same quality, the language's remarkable power to sway the listener, also made Dutch an exceptionally dangerous tool, one that could be terribly destructive if misused.

If [a Dutch preacher] has his tongue well in his command and should it get it into his head that a broom was to be [a] bride, he will induce the congregation to come to the wedding. Nay, he will provoke even worse things, tending to cause the misery of wife and children, the loss of life and property, but also the general ruin of the country, as is only too evident, a thing to be deplored. And all this is due to the vehement emotional appeal of this language.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 86, 88. On the use and meaning of the word *beweeghlicheyd* (modern *beweeglijkheid*), which Rembrandt used famously to describe his style in a letter to Constantijn Huygens, see Pauw-de Veen L. de, "Over de betekenis van het woord 'beweeglijkheid' in de zeventiende eeuw", *Oud Holland* 74 (1959) 202–212. Rembrandt's letter is published in Strauss W.L., *The Rembrandt Documents* (New York: 1979) 161–162.

<sup>36</sup> 'Waer vindtmen ander contreyen daer de ghemeenten alsoo ghetrocken worden, den eenen tot dit, den anderen tot dat, ende elck tot t'ghene hy hoort? wat is d'oirsaec? de beweeghlicheyd der Duytsche woorden, al veel heftelicker des menschen sin ende ghemoet tot des Redenaers voornemen dringhende, als eenighe ander': Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 86 (87). The English version of this passage and all other portions of Stevin's "Uytspraeck" cited in the text are from the complete English translation by C. Dikshoorn, printed in Dijksterhuis (ed.), *Principal Works* I, 59–93. Page references to the translation appear here in parentheses.

<sup>37</sup> 'want soo hy de tong wel t'sijnen bevel heeft, ende dat hem maer int hooft, quaem een bessem de bruyt te sijne, hy sal de ghemeente bewegen ter bruyloft te comen; Ia noch al slimmer dinghen doen bestaen, streckende niet alleen tot ellende van wyf en kinderen, tot verlies van lijf en goet, maer oock tot ghemeene verderfnis des landts, als metter daet, dat beclaghelick is, te veel blijft; Ende dit al door die heftighe beweeghlicheyd deses tael's': Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 86 (87).

Consequentially, Stevin expresses the wish that 'such a function... fall to no persons expert in the use of the Dutch language but those who have the welfare of all in view'.<sup>38</sup>

Stevin also claims that the greatness of Dutch lay in the language's unmatched ability to describe and analyze the objects of the natural world. 'None of the other nations', he opines, 'could imitate [Dutch] as far as the fundamental meaning of the language and the representation of the thing are concerned'.<sup>39</sup> According to Stevin, the power of Dutch to signify and analyze objects of nature made the language an ideal tool for teaching the arts. 'Where', he asks, 'would you find any languages in which one can say *Evestaltwichtich* (of equal apparent weight), *Rechthefwicht* (vertical lifting weight), *Scheefdaellini* (oblique lowering line), and the like, in which the Art of Weighing abounds?'<sup>40</sup> 'They do not exist', he concludes, for 'Nature has specially designed Dutch for it'.<sup>41</sup> Later, in a segment aimed at countering the arguments leveled against Dutch by foreigners, Stevin underlines the point by praising his mother tongue as 'capable of thoroughly interpreting the profound secrets of Nature'.<sup>42</sup> He challenges Dutch writers to demonstrate this aptitude by taking for their subject matter 'those things which have hitherto been Nature's profound secrets in all the other languages, which [other languages] cannot completely denote'.<sup>43</sup>

Above all else, however, the author of the 'Discourse' held the superiority of Dutch to lie in the language's 'ingenious structure'.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> 'Daerom waert wel te wenschen, dat gheen ander begaefde der Duytsche tong, sulck ampt ten deele en viele, dan diens einde tot de ghemeene welvaert strect': Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 86 (87).

<sup>39</sup> 'gheen van al d'ander Gheslachten der volcken wie hy sy, t'selve, soo veel des spraecx grondelicke beteeckening, ende uytbeelding der Saeck belangt': Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 84 (85).

<sup>40</sup> 'waer wildy spraken halen daermen duer segghen sal, Evestaltwichtich, Rechthefwicht, Scheefdaellini, en dierghelijcke daer de Weeghconst vol af is?': Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 84 (85). The 'Art of Weighing' (statics, hydrostatics) was one of Stevin's competencies and the subject of *De Beghinselen der Weeghconst*, the treatise introduced by the 'Discourse'.

<sup>41</sup> 'sy en sijnder niet, de Natuer heeft daer toe aldereyghentlicxt het Duytsch veroirndent': Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 84 (85).

<sup>42</sup> 'de Duytsche spraeck, welcke de diepe verborghentheden der natuer grondelic uytbeelden can': Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 88 (89).

<sup>43</sup> 'neemt voor gtondt t'ghene in al d'ander spraken tot noch toe der Naturen diepe verholentheden sijn, welcke sy niet ter deghe bedien en connen': Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 91 (92).

<sup>44</sup> 'constich maecsel': Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 64 (65).

Stevin emphasizes that, since its inception in ancient times, Dutch had gloried in primitive root words, monosyllabic utterances that supposedly sound like the meanings they convey.<sup>45</sup> Stevin counted 742 Dutch words of this sort in the first person, purportedly more than any other language. He lists them in alphabetical order in his 'Discourse', along with their multisyllabic French and Latin equivalents.<sup>46</sup> Stevin claims that, by contrast, Latin possesses only five such monosyllables and ancient Greek none proper.<sup>47</sup>

The language's unmatched plentitude of root words gave Dutch a great advantage over all other tongues, according to Stevin. First, it allowed Dutch speakers to express ideas and emotions with supreme speed and efficiency. 'The object of language', Stevin remarks, 'is [...] to expound the tenor of our thought, and just as the latter is short, the exposition also calls for shortness; this can best be achieved by denoting single things by single sounds.'<sup>48</sup> Dutch monosyllables stimulated Stevin's countrymen to become masters of such quick, short exposition. Speakers of Latin, conversely, 'did not aim at such brevity'. On the contrary, the ancient Romans 'liked to lengthen in accordance with their custom that which was short and good with [Dutch].'<sup>49</sup>

Second, the curt, pithy utterances characteristic of Dutch readily amalgamated to form complex neologisms, immediately comprehensible owing to the familiar meaning of their parts. Stevin regards compounding (*T'saemvoughingh*), the merger of short words to form more complex vocabulary, to be 'one of the principal and most useful

<sup>45</sup> Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 64, used the term *ynckel* to designate the monosyllabic word type. Goropius Becanus, the author of the *Twe-spraack*, and Franciscus Junius (1591–1677) also identified monosyllabism as a fundamental, distinguishing feature of Dutch. For overviews of this matter, see Wal, *Moedertaal centraal* 48–52; Wal, "Early Language Typology" 95–99; and Brink, "Linguistic Theories" 140.

<sup>46</sup> Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 67–70. For example, the short, quickly articulated Dutch '(Ick) laeck' (I lessen) aligns with 'je diminue' and 'diminuo'; while '(Ick) moet' (I must) links with 'Il me faut' and 'debeo'; and so forth.

<sup>47</sup> Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 64. The author admitted to forty-five single-sounded Greek words, but declared them to be long words that had been contracted.

<sup>48</sup> 'T'einde der spraken is[...]te verclaren t'inhoudt des ghedachts, ende ghelijck dat cort is, also begheert die verclaring oock cortheyt, de selve can bequamelicxt gheschien, duer ynckel saken met ynckel gheluyden te beteecken': Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 64 (65).

<sup>49</sup> 'soo doch de Latinen na sulcke cortheyt niet ghetracht en hebben, maer ter contrari, t'gheen by ons cort en goet was, dat hebben sy naer huerlieder gebruyck gheern verlangt': Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 80 (81). On brevity as a value in art and style during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Jansen J., *Brevitas: Beschouwingen over de beknoptheid van vorm en stijl in de Renaissance* (Hilversum: 1995).

properties required in languages'.<sup>50</sup> Although, he claims, scholars hold ancient Greek to be best tongue for merging existing words to form new ones, 'Greek composition is not superior to Dutch, but far inferior [...] for in the latter, it is always possible [to form new words by compounding], and such with a special brevity, suitability, and proper denotation of their fundamental meaning, which are the necessary consequences of the above-mentioned multitude of single sounds, which are also wonderfully suited for composition.'<sup>51</sup> That is to say, Dutch is the best language for compounding because its plentitude of root words makes the process especially speedy and effective.<sup>52</sup>

Not only are Dutch compounds produced with special quickness and efficiency, according to Stevin, they are more readily grasped than in any other language. To comprehend the meaning of Dutch compound words, Stevin writes, the listener need not be a scholar, nor need he think for long. Understanding is 'automatic' even for the unlearned 'because such words are understood not only through usage, but owing to the common character of the sounds'.<sup>53</sup> The component root words, comprehensible to all Dutch speakers and expressive in themselves, remain visible and meaningful even when they are subsumed into larger structures. For Stevin, this allegedly unique structural feature – the stringing together of myriad terse, independent,

<sup>50</sup> 'Ten tweeden soo volghter van der woorden voornomde T'saemvoughingh gheseyt te worden, welcke niet t'onrecht voor een der voornaemste ende nutste eyghenschappen die in talen begheert worden': Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 82 (83).

<sup>51</sup> 'Hier in wort byden gheleerden het Griecx gheluckigher gheacht als d'ander, dat is, als de ghene die by haer verleben wierden, onder welcke het Duytsch gheen plaets en had...[maer] de Griecsche Tsaemvoughing niet boven de Duytsche, maer verre daer onder, want in die sijn hier en daer sommige woorden diese lijden, maer in dese overal, ende dat met een ander besonder cortheyt, gheschictheyt, ende eyghentlicker beteekening haers grondts, welcke nootsakelick volghen uyt de voorgaende groote menichte der ynckel gheluyden, daerenboven ter bequame T'saemvoeghing wonderlick ghetroffen': Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 82 (83). The idea that Dutch surpasses Greek in word formation appears also in "Montanus Petrus, *De spreeckonst* (Delft, Ian Pietersz. Waalpot: 1635)" IV, 4; and in Vondel Joost van den, 'Aenleidinge ter Nederduitsche dichtkunst' (Amsterdam, Joost Hartgers: 1650); cited by Jansen, *Brevitas* 553, n. 7.

<sup>52</sup> The *Twe-spraack* also emphasized the compounding ease of the Dutch language: see Wal, "Early Language Typology" 97; Brink, "Linguistic Theories" 142.

<sup>53</sup> 'ende daer toe en behouft hy gheen gheleerde te sijne, noch hem lang te bedencken, maer de leecken worden, duer de wonderlicke eyghenschap des tael, van selfs daertoe ghedronghen. Ten is den hoorenden oock gheen nieu noch vreemt woort, hoewel hy dat van te vooren noyt ghehoort en had, reden dat sulcke niet alleen duer de ghewoonte verstaen en worden, maer uyt den ghemeen aert der gheluyden': Stevin, "Uytspraeck" 82 (83). For more on this point, see Brink, "Linguistic Theories" 145.

expressive elements to build a complex whole – forms the basis of the language's '*beweeghlicheyd*,' its vehement emotive force.

How does the historic defense of the Dutch language outlined above relate to the art of Frans Hals? In its essential features, Hals's play of the brush corresponds to properties held by Stevin and other early modern linguists to characterize the Dutch mother tongue. Like *Duyts*, it is set apart by forceful expressiveness and emotional appeal. Like *Duyts*, it is uniquely attuned to capturing the complexities of nature. Like *Duyts*, it champions brevity and quickness of execution. Indeed, the artist's blunt, concise strokes and blotches that maintain their independence while contributing to a complex yet instantly legible whole might well be regarded as the visual equivalents of the monosyllabic root words that, by virtue of their concentrated brevity and ease of compounding, dignified and empowered the native tongue.<sup>54</sup> The prominence of such marks in Hals's pictures not only associates Hals's subjects with the quickness, naturalness, and forcefulness credited to the Dutch language, it also identifies them with the ongoing effort to defend the mother tongue and, by extension, the cultural integrity of the newly independent Dutch state.

It may be no accident, therefore, that leading figures of Hals's generation implicated in the ongoing movement to champion *Duyts* and other essential features of native Dutch culture chose Hals to paint their portraits. Petrus Scriverius (1576–1660), who in 1626 hired Hals to reproduce his likeness in a tiny but powerful picture [Fig. 7], was perhaps his generation's most distinguished advocate of the Dutch language, a man whose professed goal was to build up native Dutch literature so that it could vie with that of any country past or present.<sup>55</sup> As a publisher, Scriverius became a main sponsor of vernacular writing in the Netherlands, bringing forth seminal works by Daniel Heinsius

<sup>54</sup> Here my inference regarding the relationship of word-sound and brushstroke approaches those encountered in the semiotic analyses mentioned above.

<sup>55</sup> Liedtke, *Dutch Paintings* 274–283; and Slive (ed.), *Frans Hals* 185–189. A pendant portrait by Hals representing Scriverius's wife, Anna van der Aar, is also in the Metropolitan Museum. For biographical treatments of the Leiden publisher, born Pieter Schrijver, see Langereis S., *Geschiedenis als ambacht. Oudheidkunde in the Goldene Eeuw: Arnoldus Buchelius en Petrus Scriverius* (Haarlem-Hilversum: 2001); Tuynman P., "Petrus Scriverius (12 Jan. 1576–30 April 1660)", *Quaerendo* 7, 1 (1997) 4–45; and the still valuable Aa A.J. van der, *Biographisch woordenboek der Nederlanden* (Haarlem: 1852–1878) XVII, 182–185.





Fig. 7. Frans Hals, *Portrait of Petrus Scriverius* (1626). Oil on panel, 22.2 × 16.5 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, H.O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer, 1929

(1580–1655), the first humanist to produce major works of poetry in the mother tongue, and by Gerbrand Adriaensz. Bredero (1585–1618), the first playwright to celebrate fully the richness of the Dutch vernacular.<sup>56</sup> Scriverius even wrote verse in praise of his local language. Directing his words to his beloved subject, he called upon Netherlandish poetry not to ‘cede pride of place to ancient Greek or Roman’, but instead to ‘spread your wings now wide, as Heinsius taught you to do’.<sup>57</sup>

Samuel Ampzing (1590–1632), whom Hals portrayed around 1630 [Fig. 8], was hardly less central than his friend Scriverius to the same campaign.<sup>58</sup> This Haarlem clergyman, poet, and historian, known to scholars mainly for his *Description and Praise of the City of Haarlem* (*Beschryvinge ende lof van der stad Haerlem*), first printed in 1628, seems to have been in sympathy with the particular methods of lauding the mother tongue discussed above. Significantly, he introduced his book about Haarlem with a lengthy treatise on the proper use of the Dutch language, the ‘Nederlandsch Tael-bericht’, which drew upon ideas about the native vernacular introduced in the publications of Stevin and others.<sup>59</sup> He also translated books from Latin into Dutch, including at least one by Scriverius.<sup>60</sup>

Hals also painted likenesses of Theodorus Schrevelius (1572–1649), Pieter Christiaansz. Bor (1559–1635), and Jacobus Revius (1586–1658),

<sup>56</sup> Heinsius Daniel, *Nederduytsche poemata* [...] *uytgegeven door P[etrus S]criverius* [...] (Leiden, H. van Westerhuisen: 1621), and other editions. On Scriverius’s sponsorship of Bredero, see Stuiveling G. – Damsteegt B.C., *Verspreid werk G.A. Bredero* (Leiden: 1986) 240; and Tuynman P., “Petrus Scriverius” 42–43, n. 74. Bredero’s celebrated defense of the Dutch language is discussed in relation to painting and reproduced in Alpers, “Realism as a Comic Mode” 120, 140–144.

<sup>57</sup> Heinsius Daniel, *Nederduytsche poemata* (Amsterdam, W. Janssen: 1616); cited in Schwartz G., *Rembrandt: His Life, His Paintings* (New York: 1985) 24. A portion of Scriverius’s poem is transcribed in Hagen A.M., *O Schone moedertaal. Lofzangen op het Nederlands 1500–2000* (Amsterdam: 1999) 21–22.

<sup>58</sup> Slive, *Frans Hals*, I, 125; III, 46; and Slive (ed.), *Frans Hals* 246–247. On Ampzing, see Kurtz G., “Samuel Ampzing en Petrus Scriverius en hun werk”, in Ampzing Samuel, *Beschryvinge ende lof der stad Haerlem*, 1628 (Amsterdam: 1974) n.p.; and Bièvre E. de, “Violence and Virtue: History and Art in the City of Haarlem,” *Art History* 2 (1988) 310.

<sup>59</sup> Ampzing, *Beschryvinge* (the unpaginated ‘Nederlandsch Tael-bericht’ comprises the fifty-one pages following the book’s foreword); reprinted in Zwaan, *Geschiedenis Nederlandsche Spraakkunst* 133–191. On Ampzing’s contribution to linguistic scholarship, see Zwaan, *Geschiedenis Nederlandsche Spraakkunst* 21–39.

<sup>60</sup> Scriverius Petrus, *Saturnalia, ofte poëtisch Vasten-avond-spel, vervatende het gebruyk ende misbruyk van den taback* [...] in ‘t Latijn beschreven [...] in Neder-Duytsch vertaeld door Samuel Ampzing (Haarlem, Adriaen Roman: 1630).





Fig. 8. Frans Hals, *Portrait of Samuel Ampzing* (ca. 1630). Oil on copper, 16.5 × 12.7 cm. Private Collection, New York

civic-minded scholars who, in their histories and poetry published in the vernacular, undertook to glorify Dutch culture in terms analogous to those outlined above.<sup>61</sup> These patriotic intellectuals, along with Scrivenerius, Ampzing, and others, might have been attracted to the Haarlem master, at least in part, because they understood his handling of paint to accord with elements of their political and cultural agendas. It is also possible that Hals's innovative manner was stimulated, in a general sense if not in its specifics, by the particular idea of 'Dutchness' that these men promulgated.

I am not suggesting that Hals's brilliant painting style reduces neatly to a symptom of the era or that other factors were not important in its creation. It does appear, however, that Hals's innovative manner may have been colored by the concerns of nation building, and that we might profit by learning more about how that new style relates to contemporary attempts by Dutch patriots to construct a unique national culture at the dawn of the Golden Age. This research might illuminate further the distinctiveness of Hals's visual language – truly a language of Dutch independence – and the esteem in which the artist's work was held by many of his contemporary countrymen.

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<sup>61</sup> On Hals's portrait of Schrevelius, see Slive, *Frans Hals* III, 7; and Slive (ed.), *Frans Hals* 141–143. On Hals's lost portrait of Bor, see Slive, *Frans Hals* III, 120–121. On his lost likeness of Revius, see Slive, *Frans Hals* III, 125. Revius demonstrated the abundance and expressive capacity of Dutch root words in a poem about Noah's Ark composed entirely of monosyllables; see Revius Jacobus, *Over-Ysselsche Sangen en Dichten*, ed. Smit W.A.P. (Utrecht: 1976), II, 161–162.

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## II. METHOD



THE HYBRID TEXT:  
TRANSFORMATION OF THE VERNACULAR IN  
*BEWARE THE CAT*

Trudy Ko

The presence of the local is one of the qualities that distinguishes William Baldwin's *Beware the Cat* from other works of early English prose fiction. As an anti-Catholic satire dressed up as a story about a man who hears cats speak, it is a tale that is unlike many of the translations and adaptations of romance narratives, originally written in continental and classical languages appropriately set in distant places at distant times, that came to define English prose fiction in the late 1550s and 1560s.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, *Beware the Cat*, composed in 1553,<sup>2</sup> is set in sixteenth-century London in the immediate past of its earliest readers: at the court of Edward VI on the eve of 28 December 1552.

*Beware the Cat* is not only written in vernacular English, but also incorporates words from vernacular Irish. Moreover, the text's engagement with the vernacular extends beyond language to include local customs and local details about geographical regions and their history – in short, transcribing the world of the reader into text. For this reason, Baldwin's text is much closer to the compilations of short anecdotes, jest books, and the 'forerunners of the picaresque novel and pseudo-biographical works of fiction'.<sup>3</sup> *Beware the Cat* is also similar to these

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of early English prose fiction, see Salzman P., *English Prose Fiction, 1558–1700* (Oxford: 1985) 7. Ringler W.A. Jr. – Flachmann M. (eds.), *Beware the Cat: The First English Novel* (San Marino: 1988) 75–126, provide the history and plot summaries of longer fictional prose narratives in English to 1558.

<sup>2</sup> While composed in 1553, Baldwin's text was printed only after the end of Mary's reign due to its anti-Catholic polemic (*A Mirror for Magistrates*, ca. 1554, and *The Funerals of King Edward the Sixth* were also suppressed for similar reasons). The earliest extant copy of *Beware the Cat* dates to 1570, although records indicate the existence of a much earlier edition, ca. 1560. For an earlier dating of the work, see Ko T., 'Backdating the first edition of William Baldwin's *Beware the Cat* nine years', *Notes and Queries* 56 (2009) 33–34.

<sup>3</sup> Ringler – Flachmann, 'Introduction', in *Beware the Cat* xiii–xiv. For examples of jest books and short anecdotes, see Andrew Borde's *Scoggin's Jestes* (1549), *A Hundred Merry Tales* (1525), and others reproduced in Hazlitt W.C. (ed.), *Shakespeare*

works for its representation of oral culture, which is typical of the vernacular. Jest books like Andrew Borde's *Scoggin's Jests* may take some of their stories from oral tradition, but Baldwin's *Beware the Cat* actually depicts the mechanisms by which oral storytelling is perpetuated. Furthermore, *Beware the Cat* is unique for two reasons: first, for its narrative coherence in encapsulating a series of nested frame narratives in a single, unified whole;<sup>4</sup> and second, for its conscious reflection on the act of transposing oral tradition into textual form. Given that the former has been extensively evaluated,<sup>5</sup> this essay will focus on the latter by examining the transformation of the vernacular through the textualisation of the oral medium.

As suggested, *Beware the Cat* engages with the vernacular as both a language and a way of thinking; that is, local customs and perceptions have an essential role in the creation of a local language. But before investigating how these worldviews and practices are transmitted through oral culture, we must first consider the permeable boundary between life and art that permits the assimilation of these views and practices into an everyday language.

Appropriately enough, the story of *Beware the Cat* begins as four men, having gathered at the court of Edward VI, end up falling into a discussion about 'whether birds and beasts had reason' (5) and can speak. This pseudo-historical scene setting recalls the opening passages in Thomas More's *Utopia*, the English translation of which was published two years before *Beware the Cat*,<sup>6</sup> and which serves as one of the few literary precedents for Baldwin's creative fiction.<sup>7</sup> Here, a fictional

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*Jest-Books*, 3 vols (London: 1864) and Zall P.M., *A Hundred Merry Tales and Other English Jest-books* (Lincoln, NE: 1963).

<sup>4</sup> This kind of narrative coherence was not typical of English narratives until much later. *Beware the Cat* thus anticipates the 1590s, which saw works like the publication of 'the *Long Meg of Westminster* and the popular stories of London artisans and merchants by Thomas Deloney', Ringler-Flachmann, *Beware the Cat* xiv.

<sup>5</sup> See Maslen R., *Elizabethan Fictions: Espionage, Counter-Espionage, and the Duplication of Fiction in Early Elizabethan Prose Narratives* (Oxford: 1997) 77; and Bonahue E., 'I Know the Place and the Persons': The Play of Textual Frames in Baldwin's *Beware the Cat*, *Studies in Philology* 91 (1994) 286. On the uniqueness of the work's intricate, complex framing devices, see Kinney A.F., *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England* (Amherst: 1986), 116.

<sup>6</sup> The English translation by Ralph Robinson appeared in 1551.

<sup>7</sup> Ringler-Flachmann, *Beware the Cat* xxi. Other critics echo this observation, adding similar contemporary examples: Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* (1549), and Rabelais's *Gargantua* series (first book *Pantagruel* published in 1532). See Gutierrez N.A., 'Beware the Cat: Mimesis in a Skin of Oratory', *Style* 23, 1 (1989) 53; and King J.N.,



Streamer sets out to prove to the author's persona Baldwin, a historical Ferrers,<sup>8</sup> and a fictional Willot, that indeed 'beasts and fowls had reason [...] as much as men' and even 'in some points more' (6). Like the 'Dialogue of Counsel' in book 1 of *Utopia*, this opening 'Argument' (5–7) exploits an uncanny interface between fiction and reality,<sup>9</sup> juxtaposing fictional and historical figures in a historical place and time in order to establish a plausible framework for the exploration of what might otherwise be considered ridiculous.

The ridiculous in Baldwin's text takes the form of magical potions and speaking cats, the accounts of which are given in Streamer's testimony. This testimony is divided into three parts. The first sets the place and time of Streamer's experience: in the printing house of the well-known Reformation printer John Day at the end of springtime 1551.<sup>10</sup> The second follows his adventures in creating and ingesting several mixtures allowing him to eavesdrop on the cats outside his room. Finally, the third part, largely narrated by a cat named Mouse-slayer vicariously through Streamer's newfound hearing, exposes the clandestine operations of her Catholic owners in a set of four stories.

In all three parts, apparently fantastical treatments of history are intermixed with local detail. For example, what seems like a creatively liberal explanation of the names of London's city gates precedes Streamer's painstaking depiction of the printing house, from its proximity to 'the town wall that is called Aldersgate' (9), to its specific layout, to what can be seen from the 'fair bay window opening into the garden' and then from the 'other end [...] as you enter' through 'a side door' and up 'three or four steps' on to 'the leads of the Gate' (10). Streamer's long-winded account of the history of the gates, however, is no different from his tedious description of the house, only partially quoted above. Indeed, the combination of an apparently fantastical history of the gates and the more factual depiction of the house can

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*English Reformation Literature: The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition* (Princeton: 1982) 388.

<sup>8</sup> George Ferrers was appointed lord of misrule by Master of the Revels Thomas Cawarden for Christmas festivities 1551/52 and 1552/53.

<sup>9</sup> Historical facts anchor the fiction. Baldwin was occasionally involved in the production of the revels at court. He wrote plays with John Heywood for Candlemas (2 February) and Shrovetide (14 February) for the 1552/53 season, and continued to offer his plays for the performance at the court of Queen Mary. For his correspondence with Cawarden, December 1556, see Brie F., 'William Baldwin als Dramatiker', *Anglia* 38 (1914) 157–172.

<sup>10</sup> For the calculation of this date, see Ringler – Flachmann, *Beware the Cat* xxii.

be seen as an extension of the fact/fiction dialogue with which the text opens.

In this regard, we might instead reevaluate what has been described as being ‘irrelevant and pompous explanations’ of seven of the ten London gates.<sup>11</sup> Beginning with speculations on Aldersgate, the interruption reads:

(either of one Aldrich, or else of Elders, that is to say ancient men of the city which among them builded it – as bishops did Bishopsgate; or else of eldern trees, which perchance as they do in the gardens now thereabout, so while the common there was vacant grew abundantly in the same place where the gate was after builded, and called thereof Elderngate – as Moorgate took the name of the field without it, which hath been a very moor; or else, because it is the most ancient gate of the City, was thereof in respect of the other, as Newgate, called the Eldergate; or else, as Ludgate taketh the name of Lud who builded it – so most part of heralds, I know, will soonest assent that Aluredus builded this; but they are deceived, for he and his wife Algay builded Aldgate, which thereof taketh the name as Cripplegate doth of a cripple, who begged so much in his life, as put to the silver weather cock which he stole from Paul’s steeple, after his death builded it). (9)

William A. Ringler notes that ‘Aldrich, Aluredus (Alfred), and Aldgay appear to be made-up names; King Lud is a fiction of Geoffrey of Monmouth; [and] the cripple who stole the weathercocke (which was of copper, not silver) from St. Paul’s Cathedral is pure fabrication’. True, Streamer’s explanations may ‘have little or no basis in fact’,<sup>12</sup> but this might indeed be their virtue.

For their fictional quality, these explanations arguably reflect how contemporary readers may have tried to understand the history of their world, near and far. One of the ways the text invites us to explore the interplay between historical understanding and literary creation is through the symbiotic relationship between history and poetry (i.e., fiction).<sup>13</sup> This interdependent relationship between history and poetry helps to explain the logic behind Streamer’s description of the gates

<sup>11</sup> Ringler – Flachmann, *Beware the Cat* 59, n. 9.5–23.

<sup>12</sup> Ringler – Flachmann, *Beware the Cat* 59, n. 9.5–23.

<sup>13</sup> Renaissance critical theory revealed an interdependent relationship between history and poetry even as the two were kept separate. See Sir Philip Sidney’s example on concrete particulars in Alexander G., *Sidney’s ‘The Defence of Poesy’ and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism* (London: 2004) 16; Castelvetro L., *Poetica d’Aristotele; Vulgarizzata et Sposta*, in Bongiorno A. (trans.), *Castelvetro: On the Art of Poetry* (New York: 1984) 3–4; Patrizi F., *Della Poetica*, as discussed in Hathaway B., *The Age*

and indeed his other accounts of 'history' in part 1. History is supposed to represent factual truth,<sup>14</sup> but its truthfulness (or facticity) is unavoidably limited by both contemporary readers' own limited access to what Sidney later calls 'old mouse-eaten records',<sup>15</sup> and its implication in the same 'postures and devices of rhetoric' as poetry.<sup>16</sup>

Because access to historical records is limited, Streamer's understanding of the naming of the gates according to conjecture and sound-likeness might not be nonsensical to the early modern reader: Aldersgate/Eldergate might be named after the 'Elders' of the city or the fictional 'Aluredus' in the same way that Moorgate is named after the field or 'moor' surrounding it. Furthermore, seeing history and poetry as originating from a language of expression rather than from the need to communicate emphasizes the subjective and often creative nature of history, looking forward to theorizations of poetic expression as being the 'primary and essential mode of all discourse, including history'.<sup>17</sup>

Consider, for example, how this early 'poetic' stage of human history is creatively illustrated in Streamer's mythologizing of time in parts 2 and 3. His personalization of chronology exemplifies how metaphysics was something felt and imagined rather than 'rational and abstract'.<sup>18</sup> For all his careful denotations of the hours of his activities, Streamer also waxes lyrical in his accounts of the sunrise and sunset, referring to the sun and moon by the names of their deities. Contrast the following list to the passages below, marked accordingly: Streamer retires for the night at nine at the end of part 1; overhears cats mewing outside his room 'from ten till [...] twelve' (24) at the start of part 2; goes to gather the ingredients for his potion in the morning (26); comes home and

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of Criticism: *The Late Renaissance in Italy* (Ithaca: 1962); and Tasso T., *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*, trans. M. Cavalchini and I. Samuel (Oxford: 1973).

<sup>14</sup> See Aristotle, *Poetics*, ed. D.C. Innes, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: 1995) 1451a–b. Cf. *Rhetorica ad Herrenium*, ed. E.H. Warmington, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: 1968) 1.8.13; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, ed. J. Henderson, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: 2001) 3.4.2.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander, *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy'* 14.

<sup>16</sup> Preminger A. – Brogan T.V.F. (eds.), *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: 1993) s.v. 'History and Poetry'. Cf. Hathaway B., *The Age of Criticism* 129–202.

<sup>17</sup> Preminger – Brogan, *New Princeton Encyclopedia* 534. Cf. Vico G., *New Science: Principles of the New Science Concerning the Common Nature of Nations*, 3rd edn, trans. D. Marsh (London: 1999) 144–149.

<sup>18</sup> Vico, G., *New Science* 144.

'tarrie[s] till ten o'clock' before lunch (27); consumes part of his concoctions at 'twelve of the clock' (28); consumes the rest at 'six o'clock at night' (29); and retires to his chamber at 'past nine' (30):

[The sunrise:]

And as soon as restless Phoebus was come up out of the smoking sea and, with shaking his golden-colored beams which were all the night long in Thetis' moist bosom, had dropped off his silver sweat into Hera's dry lap, and kissing fair Aurora with glowing mouth had driven from her the advouterer Lucifer, and was mounted so high to look upon Europa that, for all the height of Mile-End steeple, he spied me through the glass window lying upon my bed, up I arose and got me abroad to seek for such things as might serve for the earnest business which I went about. (24–25)

[The sunset:]

By this time waning Cynthia, which the day before had filled her growing horns, was come upon our hemisphere and freshly yielded forth her brother's light, which the reverberation of Thetis' trembling face, now full by means of spring, had fully cast upon her, whereof she must needs lose every day more and more, by means the neap abasing Thetis' swollen face would make her to cast beyond her those rades. (35)

Sun and Moon are personified such that the facts in Streamer's testimony become much more personal. Streamer does not just awake at dawn; Phoebus (the sun) finds him (25). Likewise, Cynthia (the moon) who, being unable to find Streamer in his room, 'hied her apace to the south, and at a little hole in the house roof peeped in and saw [him] where [he] was set to harken to the cats' (36), effectively returning us to the main action of the narrative after Streamer's pedantic digression on astronomy (35).

The above examples show how myth and fact interweave in *Beware the Cat* to exemplify a special kind of heterogeneity that comprehends the fantastical and quotidian in a dynamic way. But the text also explores this fact/fiction dialogue through its emphasis on testimony and verification in oral transmission. Traversing the hinterlands of England, Ireland, and Scotland through a succession of stories and stories-within-stories told by humans and animals alike, Baldwin's text draws into its larger imaginary more regional accounts of history.

The opening dialogue in part 1 of Streamer's testimony, for example, demonstrates how the exchanging of ostensibly parochial accounts can combine to form a collective memory, crystallizing rumour-like anecdotes by affirming what one has heard through corroborating testimonies. During a discussion about cats similar to the one depicted

in the opening 'Argument', Thomas, a man from Ireland also lodging in Day's printing house, confesses that he would not have shared his story had a similar account not been given:

'I will tell you, Master Streamer', quod he, 'that which was told me in Ireland, and which I have till now so little credited, that I was ashamed to report it. But hearing that I hear now, and calling to mind my own experience when it was, I do so little misdoubt it that I think I never told, nor you ever heard, a more likely tale'. (12)

The account he is referring to, and which now gives him confidence to share his own, is about a man from Staffordshire, who, one night while riding 'through Kankwood about certain business', is interrupted by a cat who instructs him to tell his own cat that 'Grimalkin is dead' (11).

According to the text, Grimalkin was the chief prince among cats (47), whose death, Thomas realizes, must be the subject of the story he heard about in Ireland. Thus prompted, Thomas eagerly shares a story about a soldier-thief and his boy who, while cooking some of their spoil in a church one night, are interrupted by a cat who demands in Irish, "Shane foel", which is "give me some meat" (13). But the cat is insatiable, so the two take off in fear, only to discover the cat suddenly reappear behind them; they kill it in defense.

The timing of the two accounts coincide: the narrator of the first (a servant in the household) is sure that it took place 'not passing forty years, for his mother knew both the man and the woman which ought [owned] the cat that the message was sent unto' (11), and Thomas, who heard his story 'about thirty-three winters past' (12), confirms that it took place 'not seven years before' (14) the time he heard it. But coincidence in timing is only one of the ways in which these stories crystallize, for they in fact become assimilated into the collective consciousness through a refraction of storytelling.

The stories that Thomas and the servant tell Streamer and company have been told to them: Thomas by a 'churl' (12) during his time in Ireland, and the servant by a man from his county in Staffordshire (11). What is more, the stories themselves depict an ongoing reportage: the cat in the first story is passing on news of Grimalkin's death, which must then be further passed onto the man's wife and cat (11), and both stories quote the cats, the first in English and the second in Irish (11-12).

By quoting Grimalkin in Irish, Baldwin gives a local flavour to the text. The story about the 'kern' (soldier) in the 'fassock' (wilderness)

told to Thomas 'on a night at coshery' (feast) (12), suggests 'a familiarity with the vocabulary of the region'.<sup>19</sup> *Beware the Cat* also preserves the vernacular through local customs. The kern and his boy, for example, roast a sheep 'after the Irish fashion' (13), and later 'cut a piece of the hide' from a cow and 'pric[k] it above four stakes' above the fire, again 'after their country fashion' (13).<sup>20</sup>

Such details are set in more or less accurate history. Thomas introduces his story by recalling 'the time that Mac Murrough and all the rest of the wild lords were the King's enemies, what time also mortal war was between the Fitz Harrises and the Prior and Convent of the Abbey of Tintern' (12). These historical markers, the situation and names, are typical of the time, even if they cannot be identified precisely because the early records of Wexford, a town into which 'Cahir Mac Art, a wild Irishman then the King's enemy [...] daily made inroads' (12), are fragmentary.<sup>21</sup> Wexford in Ireland, Kankwood (i.e., Cannock Chase) in England, and later Caithness in Scotland (51) set out regional demarcations for the more specific settings of the cities and homes in which the action of Baldwin's narrative unfolds.

While the above examples show how *Beware the Cat* engages with the vernacular in both words and ways of thinking, they also show how the relationship between the two is facilitated by the oral tradition of storytelling. Myth and fact combine in these early creations and transmissions of history, where regional details are shared through attempts to verify incredible events such as the death of a carnivorous, speaking prince of cats. Later, exchanged stories grow even more fantastical as characters try to speculate on the nature of these cats, drawing upon further conjectures about how they might actually be witches in disguise (16–20), duping men and women through magical illusion by 'deluding the sight and fantasies of the seers' (17).

The significance of the word *conjecture* is borne out by the epistemological thrust behind each story shared. Variations of 'I have heard'

<sup>19</sup> Ringler – Flachmann, *Beware the Cat* 60, n. 12.8–14.23. See notes by the Rev. James Graves in Malcomson R., 'Notice of *Beware the Cat*', *Journal of the Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland* 3, 1 (1868) 187–192.

<sup>20</sup> A visual depiction of this is given on the title page of Ringler and Flachmann's edition. Cf. the woodcut illustration of an Irish feast in John Derricke's *Image of Ireland* (1581).

<sup>21</sup> For a more thorough analysis of Baldwin's use of historical detail, see Ringler – Flachmann, *Beware the Cat* 60, n. 12.8–14.23. Cf. Hore H.F., *History of the town and country of Wexford* (London: 1900–11) 71–76.

(17); 'I know by experience' (16); 'this is true witnessed'; 'This man told' (18); 'I perceive [...] is true' (19); 'I heard it told'; and 'I have said nothing but that I have seen' (20) strengthen the general structure of 'I do not know [...] but I have heard [...] so I am sure' (17) governing each character's testimony. These prefaces and caveats underline the epistemological focus of the text, introduced by that initial question of whether 'beasts and fowl had reason' (6) and later extended to seeking out ways to search out the 'unsearchable' (29). But they also highlight the manner in which these stories are told and authorized, such as through hearsay and information from 'diverse other creditable men' (14).

As the currency of exchange in *Beware the Cat*, hearsay and gossip thus demonstrate one of the primary ways local information is incorporated into the vernacular. Situated at that very permeable boundary between fact and fiction, life and art, these modes of oral communication bring together local customs and practices, and fantastical and historical accounts, into a regional language that is familiar and personal. Yet at the same time, *Beware the Cat* is also a self-reflexive text that explores the possible changes to this regional language once the oral is made textual. It explores these changes by first setting the oral mode of communication alongside other forms of media, all of which are introduced immediately in the opening dedicatory epistle.

First there is, of course, the oral testimony, which 'Master Streamer told the last Christmas' and which the dedicatee John Young, 'so fain would have heard reported by Master Ferrer himself' (3). Then there is the manuscript that Baldwin has so faithfully 'penned for [his] mastership's pleasure' by using 'so nearly [...] both the order and words of him [Ferrer] that spake them' that he is certain that not only will Master Ferrer and 'Master Willot [...] in the reading think they hear Master Streamer speak' but that Ferrer 'himself in the like action shall doubt whether he speaketh or readeth' (3). Last there is the printed text, which Baldwin has made 'book-like' by dividing Streamer's 'oration into three parts [...] set[ting] the argument before them and an instruction after them, with such notes as might be gathered thereof' and 'entitl[ing] [it] *Beware the Cat*' (3).

These major modes of communication are represented in Baldwin's text in the following ways: the spoken word in oral testimony, onomatopoeia (32), and gossip (42, 47); the manuscript in the letter used in Mouse-slayer's version of the tale of the weeping bitch (43–44); and the printed book in the references to the printing of other books

(3, 36) and the marginal apparatus used to gloss esoteric words and guide readers through obscure passages. *Beware the Cat* is often read with a bias toward the printed text and the reading practices that it apparently supports. Nancy A. Gutierrez interprets Baldwin's text as a textual 'process', through which the reader learns 'to read, interpret, and finally act in an ethical manner';<sup>22</sup> Terence N. Bowers considers the work as 'an argument for widespread literacy', moving from a sense-based knowledge to a 'text-based' one.<sup>23</sup> Both critics echo what is commonly noted about the text: that it is a critique of oral culture.<sup>24</sup>

However, the representation of the oral in *Beware the Cat* complicates any such argument. Whereas part 1 of Streamer's oration represents the most basic elements of the vernacular by cultivating regional dialect forms and local customs and local histories through oral tradition, part 2 captures the spirit of the vernacular in depicting the everyday sounds localized in and emitting from the body. This body-sound relationship recalls the more vulgar components of the vernacular, where informal and colloquial expressions such as curses, oaths, and profanities were heard alongside natural bodily noises in settings like the carnival and marketplace.<sup>25</sup> With a view to how these sounds are later rendered into text, we should first consider the cacophony of sounds and their relationship to the body in the examples below.

Upon hearing the wailing of cats outside his window, Streamer first likens the discordant combination of sounds to musical dissonance: 'one sang in one tune, another in another, even such another service as my Lord's chapel upon the scaffold sang before the King. They observed no musical chords, neither diatesseron, diapente, nor diapason' (23).<sup>26</sup> He then reconsiders: 'and yet I ween I lie, for one

<sup>22</sup> Gutierrez, 'Mimesis' 51.

<sup>23</sup> Bowers T.N., 'The Production and Communication of Knowledge in William Baldwin's *Beware the Cat*: Toward a Typographic Culture', *Criticism* 33, 1 (1991) 27, 4.

<sup>24</sup> This interpretation is part of a more specific attack on Catholic tradition, with which oral culture is associated in the following: Ringler – Flachmann, *Beware the Cat* xviii; King J.N., *English Reformation*, 397; and Maslen R., "'The Cat Got Your Tongue": Pseudo-Translation, Conversion, and Control in William Baldwin's *Beware the Cat*', *Translation and Literature* 8, 1 (1999) 4–5.

<sup>25</sup> For an overview of the speech patterns in the carnival and the marketplace, see the 'Introduction' in Bakhtin M.M., *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (Indianapolis: 1984). For a more detailed account of 'the role of the cries in the marketplace', the city with 'many voices', see *ibid.*, 145–195.

<sup>26</sup> Diatesseron, diapente, diapason are, respectively, musical intervals of a fourth, a fifth, and an octave; Ringler – Flachmann, *Beware the Cat* 64, n. 23. 9–10.



cat, groaning as a bear doth when dogs be let slip to him, trolled out so low and so loud a bass that, in comparison of another cat which, crying like a young child, squealed out the shrieking treble, it might be well counted a double diapason' (23). The passage shifts images, moving from the 'singing' of the cats to their 'groaning' and 'crying' like a bear and child respectively. Through this movement, it also looks proleptically to the connection between these sounds and the bodies that produce them, showcased in a clutter of animal and human body parts that follow.

The ingredients list of Streamer's concoctions, for example, reads like an anatomy textbook: from his morning catch of a hare, fox, hedgehog, kite, and cat (26–27), Streamer makes a 'cake' from the beating together of 'a piece of the cat's liver and a piece of the kidney, a piece of the milt and the whole heart, the fox's heart and the lights, the hare's brain, the kite's maw, and the urchin's kidneys' (27).<sup>27</sup> He also makes a 'drink' from the distillation of their fat, taking 'seven parts of the cat's grease, as much of her brain, with five hairs of her beard (three black and two grey), three parts of the fox's grease, as much of the brain, with the hoofs of his left feet, the like portion of the urchin's grease and brain with his stones, all the kite's brain, with all the marrow of her bones' (28).

Both examples highlight the centrality of the body to Streamer's endeavour to hear cats speak. But the latter passage also suggests a certain amount of attention paid to the sounds of words, returning us to the initial emphasis on harmony and disharmony with which the section opens. Whatever dissonance Streamer hears from the noises around him is offset by the concordance of words in passages such as the one above. Here, words are repeated: *grease* and *brain* in phrases balanced by *as much* and *with*. Other words seem chosen to rhyme: *stones*, which refers to the hedgehog's testicles, with *bones*, adding to the subtle unity of the list encouraged by the persistence of the \ee\ sound in *grease*, *three*, and *feet*.<sup>28</sup>

This double emphasis on sound and body is further developed in passages linking the two. Streamer describes the extreme effect of the above mixtures on the 'fin'd films' of his ears:

<sup>27</sup> *Urchin* is another name for hedgehog; see *OED*, s.v. 'urchin'.

<sup>28</sup> Another example where a word seems to be chosen for its rhyming quality is when Streamer is coming back from his hunt and refers to his 'food for a meal' as 'mess' in the phrase: 'to make up the mess brought him home with the rest' (26).

I warrant you the pellicle, or filmy rime, that lyeth within the bottom of mine ear hole, from whence little veins carry the sounds to the senses, was with this medicine [...] so purged and parched [...] that the least moving of air, whether struck with the breath of living creatures, which we call voices, or with the moving of dead, [...] which are named noises, sounded so shrill in my head by reverberation [...] that the sound of them altogether was so disordered and monstrous that I could discern no one from other (31).

Amplified through ears that can now pick up sounds from ‘the highest voices of birds’ to the ‘goodly bass’ of ‘the cataracts or gulfs’ (31), as mixed as they are, the initial noises Streamer hears outside his window suddenly include the din of activity of all animals and humans within a ‘hundred mile’ radius (31).

His heightened sense of hearing takes us into the private space of women’s beds, in which he hears ‘some scolding; some laughing; some weeping; some singing to their sucking children’ (32). He also overhears the beginnings of a quarrel of ‘one shrewd wife a great way off (I think at St. Albans) call[ing] her husband “cuckold” so loud and shrilly that I heard that plain’ (32). Streamer’s interloping, however, is soon interrupted by one of the most playful passages in the text, the whole of which is worth producing below:

[I] would fain have heard the rest, but could not by no means for barking of dogs, grunting of hogs, wawling of cats, rumbling of rats, gagging of geese, humming of bees, rousing of bucks, gagging of ducks, singing of swans, ringing of pans, crowing of cocks, sewing of socks, cackling of hens, scrabbling of pens, peeping of mice, trulling of dice, curling of frogs, and toads in the bogs, chirking of crickets, shutting of wickets, shrieking of owls, fluttering of fowls, routing of knaves, snorting of slaves, farting of churls, fizzling of girls, with many things else – as ringing of bells, counting of coins, mounting of groins, whispering of lovers, springling of plovers, groaning and spewing, baking and brewing, scratching and rubbing, watching and shrugging – with such a sort of commixed noises as would a-deaf anybody to have heard. (32)

The cascade of noises captures the sheer delight of the text in the representation of sounds and the bodies that produce them. Rambling and excessive, the list is an expression of what Mikhail Bakhtin calls ‘the carnivalesque’, which celebrates the materiality of the body and the familiar speech patterns that constitute part of the tissue of everyday life.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See Bakhtin M., *Rabelais and His World*, passim.

Descriptions of the 'farting of churls, fizzling of girls', 'mounting of groins', 'groaning and spewing', 'scratching and rubbing' (32) are all part of that aspect of 'human existence which finds representation in the mode referred to as grotesque realism',<sup>30</sup> the central image of which is the excreting, eating body. This body – grotesque, exaggerated – is not individualized, but cosmic, social, and permeable, its 'material bodily principle' contained in 'a people who are continually growing and renewed' and thus possessing 'a positive, assertive character'.<sup>31</sup> The barrage of noises that overtake Streamer reflects both aspects of this body. On the one hand, the body's universal quality as part of a collective whole is captured in the sheer range of noises, 'representing all the people' since everyone is connected to the 'material and bodily roots of the world';<sup>32</sup> the buzz of animal activity preceding the infiltration of bedrooms and corners of innumerable and otherwise impenetrable private homes underscores these bodily roots as the lowest common denominator. On the other hand, the body's fecund nature is reproduced in Streamer's verbal fecundity of onomatopoeia, his excessiveness reflecting the 'images of bodily life' that inspire themes of 'fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance'.<sup>33</sup>

Yet for its 'gay and festive character',<sup>34</sup> this representation of sensuous orality is held in tension with its textualisation in a fixed space. But just as the carnivalesque finds life in its ever-present opposition to the official discourses from which it is excluded, so does oral culture find intensification against its textual backdrop. As the undying grotesque body is 'comically debased so that it may be festively reborn',<sup>35</sup> oral culture may indeed be satirized here so as to be simultaneously celebrated. Indeed, *Beware the Cat* seems fixated on the mechanisms of oral tradition. It explores this first in the personal testimony, which is exchanged to support other testimonies and to fix history through an intermingling of factual detail, hearsay, and myth-like explanations; and second in the verbal textures of Streamer's linguistic play, which is manifested in the transformation of the bawdier aspects of the vernacular when sound is rendered as text.

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<sup>30</sup> Morris P. (ed.), 'Section Four: Carnival Ambivalence', in *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov* (London: 1994) 195.

<sup>31</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 19 (Iswolsky, 'Introduction').

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Morris, 'Section Four: Carnival Ambivalence' 195.

The passages above not only provide an alternative way of looking at the representation of the oral in *Beware the Cat*, but they also demonstrate the complexities of the sound-text relationship in the transposition of one to the other. 'Sound as text', for example, is most obviously depicted in the onomatopoeia of 'barking' dogs, 'grunting' hogs, 'wawling' cats, and 'rumbling' rats (32). But these verbal utterances can equally be understood as 'text as sound', since the reading of the words *bark*, *grunt*, *wawl*, and *rumble* also produce the sounds they denote. Another example of similar emphasis can be found in Streamer's two incomprehensible utterances when he kills the hedgehog and kite. The sayings "'Shavol swashmeth, gorgona Iiscud'" and "'Javol sheleg hutotheca Iiscud'" (26), respectively, have no meaning other than their sound. In fact, the marginal gloss, which states, 'if a man when he prepareth any medicine tell aloud why he maketh it, it will be of more force' (26), seems to suggest that the entire significance of the sayings is in their sound. Like the speaking of 'hocus pocus' before a magical act, which Streamer effectively performs, their power is in their vocalization.

This relationship between 'sound' and 'text' is furthermore reflected upon through the double status of the 'oration' (3), which is what Baldwin decides to call Streamer's testimony. The oration is an interface between the oral and textual, whereby some prior text is memorized and delivered, and the delivery transcribed to be edited and circulated. This reciprocal process, by which text is made into sound and sound is then remade into text, underscores the interdependency of the two media.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, this model undermines the a priori status often attributed to the oral.

The complexity of the above relationship is brought into sharp focus in one of the most self-reflexive passages in *Beware the Cat*. In 'The Third Part of Master Streamer's Oration', the cat Mouse-slayer recounts a particularly deceitful act by one of her many owners. An old widow, who 'got her living' by pilfering the possessions of the 'young gentlemen' passing through her 'boarding' (i.e., whore) house (40), was once able to persuade a 'merchantman's wife' into committing adultery with 'one of her boarders' (41) by weaving a fictional tale mirroring the wife's own life. Tricking the young wife into believing that Mouse-

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<sup>36</sup> For further examples of this reciprocity, see Fox A., *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford: 2000).

slayer, the weeping cat before them, was actually once her daughter, the old widow recounts how this transformation was brought about by her daughter's own refusal of a similar proposal by a lusty young man, who died as a result. The plot is taken from the widely disseminated story of the weeping bitch,<sup>37</sup> but for its general similarities it has several notable differences.<sup>38</sup>

According to the original, the young wife is persuaded by the sight of the weeping cat and by the old woman's explanation. But the wife in Baldwin's version needs more convincing. Consider first the elaboration of the old woman's account of the curse: 'For my husband, the honestest man that lived, [God] hath taken from me; and with him mine heir and only son, the most towardly young man that was alive; and yet, not satisfied herewith, lo here my only daughter, which (though I say it) was as fair a woman and as fortunately married as any in this city' (42). The lineup of casualties is increased to three, and the tragedy of the losses is underlined by the apparent moral probity of the victims. Next, 'the young woman', while being 'astonished at this tale', accredits it only 'by means of [the] dame's lachrymable protestation and deep dissimulation' (42); 'Women are orators by nature', Baldwin coolly notes in the margins. However, once the dame is able to recover from her histrionics, she finally begins a last-ditch attempt to move her audience by reproducing a letter given to her daughter by the would-be adulterer. The letter is the fulcrum on which the story turns. 'A tender heart is easily pierced' is the observation in the marginal note, and 'the young woman' having 'read this letter' can do little 'to withhold her swelling tears' (43). But this letter is also Baldwin's greatest addition to the original story.

In a way that spotlights the artificiality of the letter, Baldwin brings together speech and text in a relay of perception that unseats the reader. The petition, 'The Nameless Lover to the Nameless Beloved' (43), as it begins, is signed 'G.S.' (44), the initials of Gregory Streamer. At once the elaborate framing device, which has since receded into the background during Mouse-slayer's lively exposé of her owners, is

<sup>37</sup> Although the story is first found in the twelfth-century *Disciplina Clericalis* of Petrus Alphonsi, Baldwin probably took his source from 'The Fables of Alfonse', No. 11 in William Caxton's *Fables of Aesop* (1483), where 'chienne' (bitch) is translated 'cat'. See Holden W.P., 'Introduction', in *Beware the Cat and The Funerals of King Edward the Sixth* (New London, CT: 1963) 6–22; and Ringler – Flachmann, *Beware the Cat* 71, n. 41.10–46.3, both of which reproduce the story.

<sup>38</sup> See Ringler – Flachmann, *Beware the Cat* 71, n. 41.10–46.3.

brought back in full force as the reader is reminded of the regress of narrators: Baldwin, Streamer, Mouse-slayer, the old woman, the young woman. Access to the letter has been granted through Mouse-slayer's oral testimony, which has been retold through Streamer, whose oration Baldwin has decided to make into a book.

By inserting a letter into an oral account, which itself has been textualised, Baldwin draws attention to the hybridity of his text, a quality reflected in the hybridity of his audience. Studies such as those by Adam Fox, Sara T. Nalle, and Roger Chartier help us understand the nature of the audience in the early modern period. Fox's dismantling of the oral/literate opposition breaks down the dichotomy between the illiterate 'popular' and literate 'elite' or gentry;<sup>39</sup> the audience is hybrid in the sense of oral/literate and popular/elite. However, the audience is also capacious in the sense of being able to accommodate this hybridity: Nalle's study of literacy and culture in early modern Castile reveals how age, marital status, schooling, religion, and membership of a locality can identify a reading group more accurately than social condition;<sup>40</sup> and Chartier emphasizes in his survey of reading in the West that 'no reading matter was exclusive to any one group'.<sup>41</sup>

These considerations dramatically alter the way we use the statistics of the number of books printed in the early modern period to estimate literacy rates.<sup>42</sup> The studies above, combined with further considerations regarding inventory records revealing books belonging to craftsmen and merchants,<sup>43</sup> documentation of the increase in grammar schools<sup>44</sup> and their policies to admit 'the poor man's child',<sup>45</sup> and

<sup>39</sup> See Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture* 5. Fox gives us a more accurate (albeit more complex) picture of the idea of literacy at the time by breaking down a 'crude opposition between "oral" and "literate"' in order to 'accommodate the reciprocity between the different media': 6, 11.

<sup>40</sup> Nalle S.T., 'Literacy and culture in early modern Castile', *Past and Present* 125 (1989) 65–96.

<sup>41</sup> Chartier R., 'Reading Matter and "Popular" Reading', in *A History of Reading in the West*, trans. L.G. Cochrane (Oxford: 1999) 272.

<sup>42</sup> See Bennett H.S., *English Books and Readers, 1475 to 1640* (Cambridge: 1952).

<sup>43</sup> Chartier, 'Literacy and culture' 270, notes that in Valencia between 1474 and 1550, where one-third of estate inventories mention books, 14 percent of the inventories of textile workers and 10 percent of those of manual workers list books.

<sup>44</sup> An estimated 300 grammar schools had been established in England by 1535. For an extensive study on the foundation and growth of grammar schools, see Hoepfner-Moran J.A., *The Growth of English Schooling, 1340–1548: Learning, Literacy, and Laicization in Pre-Reformation York Diocese* (Princeton: 1985).

<sup>45</sup> Strype J., *Memorials of Thomas Cranmer*, 2 vols (Oxford: 1812) I, 127–128, records how the archbishop made a case for the admission of students based on equal opportunity: God is at 'liberty to bestow his great gifts of grace [in this case, learn-

a general awareness of the act of borrowing help us to imagine an environment conducive to a wide variety of 'readers'. Among those participating in the everyday purchase of printed texts were the literate, semi-literate, and even illiterate. Nicholas Bownd observed in the 1590s that even those who 'cannot reade themselves, nor any of theirs, yet will have many ballades set up in their houses, so that they might learne them, as they shall have occasion'.<sup>46</sup> A special case can be made for the growing population of 'illiterate' readers, as the number of posted proclamations and church edicts, which were to be read aloud, shows that not being able to read did not necessarily preclude one from accessing printed text.

The manner in which Baldwin integrates speech and text fits this more comprehensive model of reading. Collapsing the stark oppositions Bowers and Gutierrez set up,<sup>47</sup> *Beware the Cat* expresses itself as both 'sense-based' and 'text-based', both oral and textual, not moving clearly from one to the other. At the threshold, *Beware the Cat* thus yields itself to nascent readers who are also in a state of transition. Both exist in a space of in-between: a hybrid text for a hybrid audience.

This liminal quality in both text and reader comes to bear on the 'influence of the written word on oral communication and mental processes';<sup>48</sup> in particular, how the textualisation of the oral medium affects the assimilation of local customs and myths into the vernacular language. Our earlier investigations of *Beware the Cat* revealed how various aspects of the vernacular are shaped by its expression in oral culture. Of particular note are the fact/fiction interplay and the celebration of the body as the source of sound. But as the vernacular becomes increasingly textualised, through the transposition of the oral into the textual, the relationship between these elements also changes.

Baldwin's decision to turn Streamer's oration into a printed book offers one way of thinking about the implication of these changes for the vernacular. By basic definition, the vernacular refers to the indigenous or native language of a particular country or district.<sup>49</sup> However,

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ing] upon any person'. Therefore, Cranmer's job, and those of the commissioners, he insisted, was to appoint students not 'according to [their] fancy' but according 'to his most godly will and pleasure'. Strype, *Memorials* 127–128, concludes: 'Wherefore if the gentleman's son be apt to learning, let him be admitted; if not apt, let the poor man's child that is apt enter his room'.

<sup>46</sup> *The Doctrine of the Sabbath* (1595).

<sup>47</sup> Bowers, 'Production and Communication' 4; Gutierrez, 'Mimesis' 54.

<sup>48</sup> Fox A., *Oral and Literate Culture* 11.

<sup>49</sup> See *OED*, s.v. 'vernacular'.

as this essay has explored, the vernacular also encompasses the paradigms or worldviews of its people, whereby the language serves as a register for the local customs and histories shared in a specific, often isolated region. While familiar to local speakers, local words and meanings are unfamiliar to national readers. In other words, Baldwin's decision to reproduce Irish words and sayings in a printed English book shows how print can make what is locally familiar extremely unfamiliar through widespread dissemination.

However, by the same token, print can also familiarize what it has initially made unfamiliar by popularizing regional information through acts of translation and through textual apparatuses like parentheses and marginal glosses. Regarding acts of translation, *Beware the Cat* records what Robert Maslen calls the 'most astonishing feat of translation of the sixteenth century'.<sup>50</sup> On the night Streamer hears cats speak, he remarks how he 'understood as well as if [the cats] had spoken English' (36), hearing the most unfamiliar vernacular as his own. With regard to textual apparatuses, Baldwin diligently explains any words or concepts that he thinks might be unfamiliar in their specific contexts: he glosses ingredients like 'Mellisophillos or Melissa (commonly called balm)' (27);<sup>51</sup> makes a note about the possible causes of 'Saint Patrick's plague' (18);<sup>52</sup> and in Thomas's account of the Irish churl's story, he clarifies that 'churl' is what 'they call all farmers and husbandmen' (12), 'boy' is what they sometimes 'call their horse-keepers' (12), 'har-ness' is 'a corslet of mail made like a shirt' (14), and "'Shane foel'", as mentioned, is the English translation for "'give me some meat'" (13).

Through the process of turning Streamer's 'oration' into a printed 'book' (3), Baldwin participates in acts of translation not only between vernacular languages, actual and metaphorical, but also between different media. What is more, his conscious engagement with the transposition of the oral medium into textual form also raises questions about the transformation of the vernacular through changes in the way information is transmitted and fixed. The full extent of these changes has been beyond the scope of this essay, but the present investigation has

<sup>50</sup> Maslen, "The Cat Got Your Tongue" 3.

<sup>51</sup> From Sir Thomas Elyot's *Dictionary* (1538), which likens Melissa to balm and melissophyllum to smallage. See Ringler – Flachmann, *Beware the Cat* 65, n. 27.15–16.

<sup>52</sup> See Ringler – Flachmann, *Beware the Cat* 63, n. 18.19. Baldwin may have been referring to the eleventh-century Patrick, Bishop of Dublin: see O'Meara J.J., *The First Version of the Topography of Ireland* (Dundalk: 1951) 114–116.



sought to add another piece to the complex picture provided by seminal studies such as those by Elizabeth Eisenstein and Adrian Johns.<sup>53</sup> In particular, our exploration of *Beware the Cat*'s cultivation of vernacular languages and customs (real and imaginary) through the oral culture of which they are typically a part of exemplifies a reappraisal of local traditions in a creative, textual context. Reviving old-fashioned, crude, and unremarkable artistic forms with regional connotations in a playful and self-reflexive manner, *Beware the Cat* earns in spades its status as the first 'original work of *English* fiction'<sup>54</sup> written in the sixteenth century.

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<sup>53</sup> Respectively, see *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communication and Cultural Transformation in Early-Modern Europe*, 2 vols (Cambridge: 1979), and *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: 1998).

<sup>54</sup> Ringler – Flachmann, *Beware the Cat* p. xiv, emphasis mine.

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LOCAL TERRAINS:  
IMAGING THE VERNACULAR LANDSCAPE IN  
SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ANTWERP

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When Hieronymus Cock published the first of two series of prints now known as the *Small Landscapes* in 1559, audiences in his hometown of Antwerp could hardly have been prepared for what they saw. The prints, eighteen in the first series and twenty-six in the second series issued in 1561, offer a variety of views of villages, farms, and country roads.<sup>1</sup> At first glance, they might seem anything but remarkable. Take, for instance, a view of a village street included in the first set [Fig. 1]. The print depicts an ordinary rural village much like those located in the countryside surrounding Antwerp in the mid-sixteenth century, and it does so in a straightforward, immediate way. In the right foreground, a traveler next to a tall, pollarded tree strides over a hillock inward toward the center of the scene while at the left other travelers sit resting on a log, their baskets set down before them. Figures in the middle of the scene walk in pairs or small groups along the main road into the village. A row of typical Flemish rural buildings lines a broad road that runs from the left foreground back to the middle distance at right along a slight diagonal. Large thatch-roofed barns alternate with stone houses, one of which at far left, partially obscured, has a stepped

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<sup>1</sup> Luiten G. – Schuckman C. (eds.), *The New Hollstein Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts 1450–1700. The van Doetecum Family, Part I: The Antwerp Years, 1554–1575* (Rotterdam: 1998) 94–135. For a full account of the two series, including how they were initially grouped, see Onuf A., “Local Terrains: The Small Landscape Prints and the Depictions of the Countryside in Early-Modern Antwerp”, PhD diss., Columbia University (2006) 13, n. 2; and Sellink M., “Master of the Small Landscapes”, in Orenstein N. (ed.), *Pieter Bruegel the Elder: Drawings and Prints* (New York: 2001) 299, n. 9.



Fig. 1. Joannes and Lucas van Doetecum after the Master of the Small Landscapes, *Village Street* (1559). Etching and engraving, 34.2 × 19.5 cm. Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België, Prentenkabinet.

roof and a tall chimney. A few trees, a draw well, and a couple of open sheds stand alongside the road. Together with the rough furrows in the road, the movement of the figures creates a gentle visual pull into the middle distance at right. Nothing disrupts the quotidian calm of this country setting, which pervades a sense of familiar recognition. As our eye moves into the view, it is as though we are able to enter into an actual place and to experience the native terrain at first hand.

It is precisely this concentration on humble rural settings and the ordinariness of their presentation that makes the *Small Landscapes* so astonishing. Though artists recorded such views in sketchbooks and drawings before this time, never before had such unassuming subject matter been given center stage as the sole focus of printed images intended for a wider audience of art collectors and connoisseurs.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the prints challenge the conditioned expectations of audiences accustomed to works of art with more explicit narrative content or unified human action. They take what had been merely the settings or backgrounds of traditional compositions and isolate them as images worthy of critical attention and aesthetic appreciation in their own right. In this way, the *Small Landscapes* are extraordinary precisely because of their persistent ordinariness. Over the course of the two series, the forty-four images repeat and vary local rural views like the one described above, multiplying the sensation of a vicarious journey through the local countryside,<sup>3</sup> and underscoring the sense of significance conferred upon such apparently insignificant locales.

In what follows, I will argue that the *Small Landscapes* initiate a new critical category of visual imagery that might best be called 'vernacular landscape'. These prints are local and native in the scope of their

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<sup>2</sup> Two surviving examples of such sketchbooks are the so-called Antwerp Sketchbook, now in the Berlin Kupferstichkabinett (inv. no. 79 C 2), and the Errera Sketchbook, now in the Brussels Koninklijke Museum voor Schone Kunsten (inv. no. 4630). Both are believed to have originated in Antwerp workshops around 1520–1540. For the dating of the Errera Sketchbook, see Dunbar B., "Some Observations on the Errera Sketchbook in Brussels", *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* 21 (1972) 53–82. For the Antwerp Sketchbook, see Bevers H., "The Antwerp Sketchbook of the Bles Workshop in the Berlin Kupferstichkabinett", in Muller N. – Rosasco B. – Marrow J. (eds.), *Herri met de Bles: Studies and Explorations of the World Landscape Tradition* (Turnhout-Princeton: 1998) 39–50.

<sup>3</sup> Freedberg, *Dutch Landscape Prints of the Seventeenth Century* (London: 1980). Melion W., *Shaping The Netherlandish Canon: Karel van Mander's Schilder-Boeck* (Chicago: 1991) 176, elucidates how contemporary texts 'defined the function of landscape as the mapping of optical itineraries'.

content, and portrayed with a convincing naturalism that assures us of their truthfulness. However, the real value of this term extends beyond simply matters of iconography and style. As we shall see through a close study of artistic, theoretical, and literary sources, the conceptual principles organizing vernacular expression in the early modern period tie the vernacular to notions of nature and naturalism that bear closely on the visual experience that the *Small Landscapes* engender. In addition, the vernacular is simultaneously characterized by an inherent instability and flexibility and a resultant capacity for generative self-renewal and innovation. As such, it stands in counterpoint to the timeless and universalizing tendencies of a classical or cosmopolitan idiom. This is strikingly demonstrated in the long lifespan of the *Small Landscapes*, which were issued in later editions by the Galle family in Antwerp well into the seventeenth century and copied in Amsterdam by Claes Visscher in 1612. In each instance, the prints retain a sense of contemporary immediacy and a capacity to communicate diverse meanings contingent upon each time and place of publication. Natural and immediate, specific and ever contemporary, the vernacular *Small Landscapes* possess a malleability that makes it possible for them to resonate across time and space and to remain relevant to contemporary audiences for almost a century. Through examining the ways in which the prints were adapted – both visually and conceptually – across the period of their publication and through a consideration of the potential contemporary resonances that result, this essay will demonstrate how the imaging of the local landscape reveals both the nature and function of the vernacular as a framework of meaning and experience in the early modern period.

### *The Vernacular Small Landscapes*

Scholars have not been able to reach consensus on the identity of the master responsible for the designs for the *Small Landscapes*. It is not even clear if the designs are contemporaneous with their publication date or if Hieronymus Cock acquired a preexisting set of drawings from an earlier source, perhaps a sketchbook.<sup>4</sup> However they were acquired,

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<sup>4</sup> For a summary of the debate on the master's identity, see Sellink, "Master of the Small Landscapes" 296–299; and Onuf, "Local Terrains" 23–25.



Cock entrusted the printmakers Johannes and Lucas van Doetecum to translate these designs onto copper plates. The van Doetecums employed their signature technique for the task, reinforcing their etched lines with engraved ones, resulting in prints that are delicately and subtly drawn as well as solidly modeled and deeply shaded.<sup>5</sup> For a project so large, the combined expenses of labor and materials would have been considerable. Taken together, the forty-four plates of the two series represent a remarkably ambitious investment in an untested type of landscape print, indicating Cock's confidence in their ultimate success.

The modesty of the *Small Landscapes*, both in their size and contents, belies their ambitious conception and impact. Measuring around 13 by 20 cm, the prints present a range of rural settings, from isolated, ramshackle rural structures to more extensive, well-maintained agricultural domains and busy village centers [Fig. 1–4]. Even the few rather grand country estates in the series are notable for the lack of monumentality with which they are presented. As in the village street in Fig. 1, all of these unprepossessing rural scenes lie quietly centered in the middle of unembellished compositions, bounded by surrounding trees and shrubs that block any vista into the deeper space of the background. The space of the scenes is limited by the consistent use of a low vantage point and horizon line, grounding us in the depicted countryside. As a result, our eye remains resolutely focused on the immediate environment. In many of the prints, a rough path or road leads from the foreground into the heart of the scene, directing our gaze into the middle ground and encouraging us to visually enter the depicted places. We are held within the limited space of the prints, as there is little or no opportunity to see beyond the middle distance [Figs. 1–3]. The sky, which is left blank except for a few long hatchings toward the top of some of the prints, emphasizes the flatness of the picture surface and discourages any suggestion of spatial depth beyond the central band of buildings and trees. As a result, the structures seem rooted to the flat surface of the earth and the viewer's eye is unable to rise above or pass beyond the barns and houses that dominate the center of the compositions.

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<sup>5</sup> Oberhuber K., *Die Kunst der Graphik IV: Zwischen Renaissance und Barock: Das Zeitalter von Bruegel und Bellange* (Vienna: 1968) 39–50, 114–122.



Fig. 2. Joannes and Lucas van Doetecum after the Master of the Small Landscapes, *Village Street with Haystack* (1561). Etching and engraving, 29.8 × 20.2 cm. Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België, Prentenkabinet.



Fig. 3. Joannes and Lucas van Doetecum after the Master of the Small Landscapes, *Farm and Row of Houses* (1561). Etching and engraving, 31.8 × 20.3 cm. Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België, Prentenkabinet.





Fig. 4. Joannes and Lucas van Doetecum after the Master of the Small Landscapes, *Farm with Courtyard* (1561). Etching and engraving, 31.9 × 20.4 cm. Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België, Prentenkabinet.

These scenes are often populated with figures walking or riding along the roads and paths [Fig. 1]. Some are peasants and shepherds tending their fields and livestock, while others appear to be well-to-do urbanites out for a country stroll or travelers on business. These figures are oddly small in proportion to their surroundings, and as a result always remain secondary staffage to the landscapes that encompass them. Their occasional presence enlivens the views, tempering their spare simplicity with a sense of animated community. Yet there is a striking absence of any significant human action or overarching narrative structure in the prints. The figures and animals complement the countryside and its natural rhythms, never themselves becoming an independent or concerted focus. Compositionally, the figures are often positioned in the foreground moving inward toward the middle ground, beckoning us into the modest scenes. They become surrogates inside the pictures for our own engagement with the landscape. Through them, we too follow the roads into the villages and rural terrian of the countryside. Though the compositional arrangement of the scenes structure the general parameters of our viewing, we are free to explore and dwell on the everyday details of each view without reference to any larger framing narrative or event.

The views also often include seemingly insignificant and casual details. For example, in more than one of the prints, a few felled logs lie scattered on the side of the road [Figs. 1 and 2]. In others, a loose shutter hangs askew from a barn window or a wooden gate rests open. Tree stumps poke up in the middle of roads, tufts of weeds grow here and there, the rooflines of barns are uneven and their walls appear rough and spackled. Like the figures and animals, these casual details underscore the ordinariness of these rustic places. They also convince us of the veracity of the scenes; such apparently unmotivated or unartful naturalism suggests that the prints record specific places as they truly appeared.

The pictorial immediacy and naturalism that characterize the prints are reaffirmed on the title page with which Cock introduced the first series of the *Small Landscapes*. The page explicitly touts the local focus and naturalistic presentation of the views. It includes both a Latin and Flemish inscription, but it is the Flemish text that provides the more precise explanation of the series. It reads: 'many and very fine situations of village houses, farms, fields, streets and the like, ornamented with all sorts of animals. All together drawn from life, and

mostly located around Antwerp'.<sup>6</sup> The opening clause might suggest that the series offers a generic compendium of typical rustic sites and motifs, but this is immediately qualified in two significant ways. First, the claim that these scenes are 'drawn from life' affirms a mimetic relationship between image and reality. David Freedberg has argued that sixteenth-century uses of the term *naer het leven* might best be understood to mean 'in a lifelike manner' or 'as if drawn from life'.<sup>7</sup> That is to say, the term asserts the credible likeness of nature captured in images so drawn, instead of signifying the sort of direct realism we might assume today. Here it signals that the *Small Landscapes* should be regarded as natural rather than artificial images, as imitations of the real rather than inventions of the imagination.

The title page goes further, however, to state that the views are not drawn from nature in a general sense, but from specific places 'mostly located around Antwerp'. This final phrase concretely situates the places depicted in the *Small Landscapes* in the countryside immediately surrounding the city. Together with the promise of naturalistic likeness, this phrase suggests a topographical verisimilitude and transparency that tethers the contents of the prints to the actual local countryside. Taking the title page at its word, some scholars have sought to identify several of the sites and locations depicted in the series.<sup>8</sup> While this task has largely been in vain, it is possible that specific views were

<sup>6</sup> 'Vele ende seer fraeye ghe-/leghentheden van diversche Dorphuysinghem, Hoe/uen, Velden, Straten ende dier ghelijcken, met/ alderhande Beestkens verciert. Al te samen ghe-/ conterfeyt naer dleven, ende meest rontom/ Antwerpen ghelegghen sijnde'. This is preceded by a less detailed Latin title that describes the series simply as 'sketches of many rustic places and cottages carefully portrayed from the life' ('*Multi-farium Casularum Ruriumq./ lineamenta curiose/ ad vivum expressa*').

<sup>7</sup> Freedberg, *Dutch Landscape Prints* 10–11. See also Parshall P., "Imago Contrafacto: Images and Facts in the Northern Renaissance", *Art History* 16 (1993) 554–579; and Swan C., "Ad vivum, naer het leven, from the life: Defining a Mode of Representation", *Word and Image* 11 (1995) 353–372.

<sup>8</sup> One print representing the Roode Port of Antwerp has been identified based on, among other sources, a drawing in the Antwerp Sketchbook in the Berlin Kupferstichkabinett, which shows this gate with the city of Antwerp behind it (inv. No. 79 C 2, fol. 46<sup>v</sup>). The two large manor houses that appear in the series have been identified as the castle Ter Meeren in Sterrebeek and the castle Vordenstein in the neighborhood of Schoten, both outside of Antwerp. See Haverkamp Begemann E., "Joos van Liere", in von Simson O. – Winner M. (eds.), *Pieter Bruegel und Seine Welt* (Berlin: 1979) 17–28; and Hautekeete S., "Van Stad en Land: Het beeld van Brabant in de vroege topographische tekenkunst", in Kerckhof V. van de – Bussers H. – Buisseret D. (eds.), *Met passer en penseel: Brussel en het oude hertogdom Brabant in beeld* (Brussels: 2000) 52, n. 56. An alternative identification of the second manor as the Castle Oud-Alkemaar near Warmond has been proposed by Bierens de Haan, based on the work

recognized by contemporary audiences in Antwerp that were familiar with the local countryside. However, this does not seem to have been the main aim of the series. The individual prints are not identified with inscriptions or labeled with a key, both common practices in contemporary prints and maps that showcase important subjects or pinpoint specific locations or monuments. Furthermore, though specifically portrayed, much of the rural architecture is so mundane that the structures seem more significant as characteristic types than as individual exemplars. These types repeat in varied arrangements throughout the forty-four views. The lack of compositional grandeur or an overarching sense of orderly arrangement in the *Small Landscapes* only solidifies the impression that the prints are intended to communicate the salient characteristics of the local terrain with unvarnished specificity rather than to memorialize particular sites. The straightforward, life-like, and apparently unartful representational mode of the *Small Landscapes* consistently underscores the humble and lowly nature of rural farmhouses, cottages, and manors that they depict.

The *Small Landscapes* can thus be categorized as vernacular images not only on the basis of their overtly local rural content, but also on the basis of style. Mark Meadow has characterized the 'peculiarly northern, descriptive style' employed by Pieter Bruegel and other Netherlandish artists as self-consciously vernacular.<sup>9</sup> Picking up on a local tradition, characterized by its capacity for reproducing the natural world that reached back to the work of Jan van Eyck and other early Netherlandish masters, Bruegel explicitly rejected the prestigious classical and classicizing canon of Italian art. The *Small Landscapes*, published at the same time as Pieter Bruegel's own career was beginning to take wing, would seem to fall squarely within the same vernacular stylistic category. They lack the monumentality and the classicizing relationship to antiquity of an Italianate artistic style, proffering instead, even more than Bruegel's own landscapes, an apparently unmediated descriptive imitation of the native, natural environment.

However, the implications of the vernacular extend beyond iconographic and stylistic considerations. It was also a mode of expression especially conjoined to landscape. This is perhaps best exemplified by

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of Jhr. Beelaerts van Blokland. See Bierens de Haan J.C.J., *L'Oeuvre gravé de Cornelis Cort, graveur hollandais 1533-1578* (The Hague: 1948) 219.

<sup>9</sup> Meadow M., "Bruegel's *Procession to Calvary*: Aemulatio and the Space of Vernacular Style", *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 47 (1996) 181-205.

the *Small Landscapes*, but it has its roots earlier in sixteenth-century Antwerp, when Joachim Patinir introduced his innovative world landscape compositions to a receptive art market. These paintings provided vistas over vast landscapes from an elevated vantage point and seemed to contain the whole ambit of the earth within their usually quite diminutive frames. Patinir's paintings and those produced by his followers promoted both the emergence of landscape as a genre<sup>10</sup> and the reputation of Northern artists on an international level, and helped to forge a definitive link between landscape and the North that was quickly and widely recognized by artists, scholars, and critics alike. This pivotal development is key to understanding the later innovation of the *Small Landscapes*, in which the vernacular landscape evolves beyond a regional specialty to become a flexible instrument of artistic and cultural expression shaped and framed through use and context, rather than through content and style alone.

### *Landscape as a Vernacular Genre*

Hieronymus Cock seems to have been aware of the place of landscape in the emerging framework of Netherlandish art and its growing distinction from Italianate and classical models. Following a trip to Italy in the late 1540s, Cock established his print shop, *Aux Quatres Vents*, in Antwerp, where he quickly set out to rival Italian publishers with a number of ambitious, large reproductive engravings executed by Italian printmaker Giorgio Ghisi after compositions by Raphael and other

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<sup>10</sup> Gombrich E., "The Renaissance Theory of Art and the Rise of Landscape", in *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (London: 1966) 107–121. Rein-dert Falkenburg has recently challenged the assumption that fifteenth- and sixteenth-century sources articulate landscape as an independent critical or aesthetic category. See Falkenburg R., "Landscape", *Kritische Berichte* 35, 3 (2007) 45–50. Rather, Falkenburg views the paintings of Patinir and his followers as essentially devotional images that utilize land and space as vectors for visual pilgrimage. See Falkenburg R., *Joachim Patinir: Landscape as an Image of the Pilgrimage of Life* (Amsterdam-Philadelphia: 1988); and more recently Falkenburg R., "The Devil is in the Detail: Ways of Seeing Joachim Patinir's 'World Landscapes'", in Vergara A. (ed.), *Patinir: Essays and Critical Catalogue* (Madrid: 2007) 61–79. While I work from a similar premise of the functionality of landscape and the visual trajectory it offers, I believe that the *Small Landscapes* suggest a legacy to Patinir's work that does in fact hinge on the emergence of landscape that is independent of the sort of iconographic meaning that Falkenburg mines within the paintings.



Italian artists.<sup>11</sup> The success of these prints inspired Cock to cultivate several house engravers and designers who would furnish him with a steady stream of Italianate prints, usually representing classical subjects engraved in a monumentalizing sculptural style learned from Ghisi's work. However, alongside these prints, early on Cock also began to publish a wide variety of landscape prints, many issued as large sets, which were designed and engraved by a different set of specialized printmakers and designers. Unlike his classicizing prints, which are thematically and stylistically consistent, Cock's landscape prints are diverse in both content and style. Before he published the *Small Landscapes* in 1559, he had issued three sets of landscapes with Roman ruins, some likely after his own designs, along with several series of panoramic, often fantastical landscapes with biblical or mythological scenes after a diverse range of Netherlandish artists, including his brother Matthys Cock and Pieter Bruegel the Elder, and in the 1560s, Lucas Gassel and Hans Bol [Fig. 6].<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that Cock exhibited a willingness to experiment with proven models and to innovate with wholly original projects with respect to landscape prints, far more so than with classicizing prints. Even though for the most part they were etched by the same printmakers, each set of landscapes is compositionally, stylistically, and conceptually distinct. In this light, however groundbreaking and significant the publications of the *Small Landscapes* proved to be, it seems likely that Cock conceived of them as an opportunity to branch out still further in the field of landscape prints that he had already so profitably mined.

He was also building upon what had come to be understood as a specialty for landscape in the workshops of Antwerp's painters. Though both Venice and the Danube region could boast significant landscape traditions, artists in Antwerp were the first to specialize in the production of landscapes and to organize large workshops for their production. This specialization was credited at the time, when Albrecht Dürer referred to Joachim Patinir as 'the good landscape painter' in a journal

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<sup>11</sup> On Cock's relationship to Italian print publishers, especially Antonio Salamanca and Antoine Lafreri, see Riggs T., *Hieronymus Cock: Printmaker and Publisher* (New York: 1977). For a recent account of Roman Renaissance printmaking, see Witcombe C., *Print Publishing in Sixteenth-Century Rome: Growth and Expansion, Rivalry and Murder* (London: 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Riggs, *Hieronymus Cock* 183–186, 256–266, 270–279, 312–313, 318–319, 335–336, and 370; Onuf, "Local Terrains" 42–56.

entry of May 5, 1521.<sup>13</sup> Though Patinir and his workshop produced a relatively modest number of paintings, these works were a genuine innovation in the art market in Antwerp for two reasons. First, most of the panels were produced on speculation rather than being commissioned, and therefore serve as indices of the shift toward a competitive open market for the production and distribution of art, which was so vital for the emergence of landscape as an independent genre.<sup>14</sup> Second, they mark a thoroughgoing realignment of the compositional and conceptual conventions of earlier landscapes.<sup>15</sup>

Patinir's paintings offer intricately detailed panoramic vistas over distant terrains, in which the traditional relationships between figure and setting and between narrative and description are inverted. The biblical and mythological stories that the minute figures enact are dwarfed by the descriptive drama of the landscape motifs, which often appear to possess a narrative competence of their own. For instance, in Patinir's small *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* panel now in Antwerp, the holy family appears embedded in the left foreground landscape rather than staged before it [Fig. 5]. Towering above and behind them, a twisting cliff juts upward, almost reaching the top of the panel surface. From an elevated vantage point, the landscape moves back through successive zones of saturated color into deep space. Rocky mountains dominate the distant horizon on the right, balancing the cliffs in the left foreground. In this composition, the figures serve to frame our experience of the landscape rather than vice versa. Patinir's elevated horizon lines and the crystalline clarity of his painted surfaces reward the viewer's active visual entrance into and movement through the deep space of the picture.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Arianne Kolb describes the commercial imperative behind Patinir's market specialization and the variation of motifs that he and his workshop employed. See Kolb A., "Varieties of Repetition: 'Trend' versus 'Brand' in Landscape Paintings by Joachim Patinir and His Workshop", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998) 167–200. See also Vergara A., "Who Was Patinir? What is a Patinir?", in Vergara A. (ed.), *Patinir: Essays and Critical Catalogue* (Madrid: 2007) 19–45.

<sup>14</sup> Silver L., *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes: The Rise of Pictorial Genres in the Antwerp Art Market* (Philadelphia: 2006) especially 1–52.

<sup>15</sup> Ewing D., "Multiple Advantages, Moderate Production: Thoughts on Patinir and Marketing", in *Patinir: Essays and Critical Catalogue* (Madrid: 2007) 81–95.

<sup>16</sup> On the landscape as a locus of attentive looking, see Melion, *Shaping The Netherlandish Canon* especially 1–12; Van Mander reports that viewers would search Patinir's paintings to locate a tiny man defecating somewhere within the expansive vista, giving rise to the artist's nickname of the 'kacker'. He compares this to Herri Bles's similar habit of including a small owl within his paintings. See Karel van Mander,



Fig. 5. Joachim Patinir, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*. Oil on panel, 21 × 17 cm. Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten. Image: © Lukas – Art in Flanders VZW.

Though Patinir had died by 1524, less than ten years after establishing himself in Antwerp, his template for panoramic views was taken up by the generation of painters who followed in his wake.<sup>17</sup> By the early 1530s, world landscapes had transitioned from a market innovation to a profitable formula in the efficient, prolific workshops of Lucas Gassel, Cornelis Massys, Jan van Amstel, and especially Herri Bles. These artists borrowed and manipulated Patinir's model, often significantly

*Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters*, ed. and trans. H. Miedema (Doornspijk: 1994) vol. 1, 134.

<sup>17</sup> Gibson W. "Mirror of the Earth": *The World Landscape in 16th-Century Flemish Painting* (Princeton: 1989) 17–36; and Vergara, "Who Was Patinir? What is a Patinir?" 28–36.





Fig. 6. Hieronymus Cock after Matthys Cock, *Judah and Tamar* (1558). Etching, 32.3 × 22.8 cm. London, British Museum.

varying their subjects and compositional organization. The result was a wide variety of landscape imagery featuring biblical, mythological, and other subjects. Lucas Gassel and his workshop, for instance, produced numerous landscapes with mining scenes. Each workshop worked from compositional models that were often repeated and varied, so that a degree of sub-specialization arose within each shop, leading to a broader diversity both in subjects and in styles within the world landscape tradition.

These workshops turned out large quantities of paintings that often relied heavily on stock motifs and compositions. These often quite formulaic landscapes found their way into collections well beyond Antwerp. Two well-known instances illustrate the exponential proliferation of Netherlandish landscapes, a category that referred to a fairly inclusive range of paintings. Marcantonio Michiel noted three painting by one 'Joachin' in the collection of Cardinal Grimani in Venice in 1521. Just a few years later in 1535, artist and art dealer Matteo del Nassaro was in possession of three hundred Netherlandish 'beautiful landscapes on panel and linen', which he offered for sale to Federigo Gonzago, Duke of Mantua, who selected 120 for his collection.<sup>18</sup> While this record makes no mention of particular Netherlandish artists, the sheer number of paintings involved suggests large workshops producing landscape paintings in bulk for international distribution. The wide circulation of Netherlandish landscapes (however broadly defined), the volume in which they were collected, and the evident regard in which they were held signal the international success achieved by Patinir's innovative formula. As world landscapes spread throughout Europe, we might say that these landscapes achieved a sort of double universality – just as the paintings pictured panoramic, universal expanses, so too the landscapes came to be distributed far and wide across Europe's international art markets.

Indeed, it was not long before landscape *per se* was described as the particular expertise of Northern artists. Walter Gibson has cogently summarized many textual sources, dating as early as 1459, that posit landscape as the preeminent skill and accomplishment of Netherlandish artists.<sup>19</sup> While the notion was so often repeated in the sixteenth century as to become a commonplace, three representative references

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<sup>18</sup> Gibson, "Mirror of the Earth" 37–38.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 39–41.

are worth particular attention. In 1548 Francisco da Hollanda attributes to Michelangelo the sentiment that Netherlandish artists produce paintings pleasing to women, the old, and the devout because they 'paint with a view to external exactness.... They paint stuffs and masonry, the green grass of the fields, the shadow of trees, and rivers and bridges, which they call landscapes'. This is accomplished, however, 'without reason or art, without symmetry or proportion, without skillful choice or boldness and, finally, without substance or vigor'. Michelangelo explicitly contrasts this with Italian art: 'it is practically only the work done in Italy that we can call true painting', since the Italian manner, 'which is that of ancient Greece', embodies all the 'noble' aspects of art gleaned from the study of classical models and principles.<sup>20</sup>

In the same year, Paolo Pino opined that 'the Northerners show a special gift for painting landscapes because they portray the scenery of their own homeland, which offers most suitable motifs by virtue of its wildness, while we Italians live in the garden of the world, which is more delightful to behold in reality than in a painting'.<sup>21</sup> Pino's formulation presumes that landscape painting fundamentally mirrors nature, and that as a result nature shapes artistic choices and proficiencies. In Italy, he argues, the actual landscape is too perfect for artists to compete with its natural delights, whereas Northern terrains can readily be mined for 'suitable motifs' because of their 'wildness'. Unruly and without order, Northern regions invite rather than restrict artistic representation.

Finally, Domenicus Lampsonius's praise of Jan van Amstel as a landscapist in his *Pictorum aliquot celebrium Germaniae Inferioris effigies*, published by Hieronymus Cock in 1572, echoes the familiar opposition between Northern and Italian aptitudes. He remarks that 'the renown characteristic of the Netherlanders is that they paint landscapes [*rura*] well; that of the Italians that they paint humans and gods', explaining that Italian artists have their brains in their heads and are therefore adept at invention, whereas Netherlanders' brains are in their hands,

<sup>20</sup> Francisco de Hollanda, *Four Dialogues on Painting*, trans. A. Bell (Westport, CT: 1979) 15–17.

<sup>21</sup> Gombrich E., "The Renaissance Theory of Art and the Rise of Landscape", in *Norm and Form: Studies in the art of the Renaissance* (London: 1966) 116; and Gibson, "Mirror of the Earth" 40.

as is required for imitating nature.<sup>22</sup> If Pino argues that the differences of natural environment explain the different capacities of Netherlandish and Italian artists, Lampsonius suggests that it is rather a matter of inherent artistic disposition; the talent of Italian artists is intellectual, Northerners manual.

These commentaries summarize the theoretical strategies by which landscape as a genre was cast as intrinsically native to the North. Northern landscape is counterposed to an Italian classicism focused on 'humans and gods'. They presume a dialectical opposition between Northern naturalism and Italian rationalism or idealism, suggesting that Northern artists possess a fundamentally empirical approach to pictorial representation compared to Italian art based on principles of 'reason' and 'skillful choice'. Northern artists base pictorial practice on the observation of 'external exactness' captured and recorded by the busy hand rather than the engaged intellect. In these texts, landscape is a natural rather than a cultivated genre – it is not attained by study or artifice, but by the portrayal of the artist's 'own homeland' by direct manual activity. As such, landscape is framed as an extension of nature rather than a product of art. Lampsonius explicitly characterizes the Netherlandish artist's faculty for landscape as innate. Landscape is the natural product of Netherlandish art precisely because empirical practice is the natural method of Netherlandish artists. This notion of landscape as a genre native to the North was clearly widespread both in theory and in practice, borne out not just in artistic discourse but also by the numbers of Netherlandish artists who, upon arriving in Italy, were employed as landscapists even when their training had prepared them in other genres.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> As translated by Miedema in van Mander, *Lives* vol. 3, 36: 'Small wonder: not for nothing is it said that the Italian has his brains in his head, but the Netherlander in his skillful hand. Thus Jan's hand would sooner that he should paint landscapes well than that his brain should make poor paintings of men and gods'.

<sup>23</sup> These artists include Maarten de Vos, Jan van Scorel, and Maerten van Heemskerck, all of whom were called upon to produce landscapes in Italy but who took up monumental figural and narrative compositions upon returning home. Karel van Mander warns Northern artists that Italians will expect them to paint landscapes and encourages them to assert their skill at depicting figures. For further examples of Northern artists in Italy, see Gibson, *"Mirror of the Earth"* 41. On van Mander, see Noë H., *Carel van Mander en Italië: Beschouwingen en Notities naar Aanleiding van zijn 'Leven der Dees-Tijtsche Doorluchtighe Italiaensche Schilders'* (The Hague: 1954); and Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon* 27.



However universal in pictorial scope and market distribution, the world landscapes of Patinir and his successors established landscape as a Northern vernacular genre, that is, one considered both native and natural to Netherlandish artists. Though these paintings often employed a variety of rustic elements – Pino's 'suitable motifs' – it is not on this basis alone that they can be designated as vernacular. Nor are stylistic criteria sufficient to term them as such; though trumpeted for their pictorial naturalism in theoretical texts, the world landscapes produced in large workshops like that of Herri Bles were in fact often highly formulaic variations on repeated compositions, hardly the products of direct description of the natural world. Rather, what emerges as native and natural about Netherlandish landscape is its distance from classicizing genres, not just in content and style, but most fundamentally in its capacity for innovation and variety. As a genre with few classical precedents and little early critical prestige (recall Michelangelo's rather disparaging commentary), landscape offered artists the liberty to experiment precisely because it was not constrained by established rules and precedents. As our commentators make clear, the only established referent for landscape is the natural world, which in its 'wild' diversity allows for broad latitude of variation and invention.

If Netherlandish landscape can be designated vernacular in this sense, then the *Small Landscapes* are perhaps less anomalous than they at first appear to be.<sup>24</sup> While scholars have rightly regarded the *Small Landscapes* as a radical break from the world landscape formulas, there might nonetheless be a theoretical link between them. If the world landscapes are the innovation that clearly marks landscape as a vernacular Netherlandish genre at the outset of the sixteenth century, then the *Small Landscapes* represent a further iteration of innovation within this specifically Netherlandish genre. As such, the prints chart the emergence of a much more complex conception of the vernacular landscape. In order to understand its facets, let us consider

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<sup>24</sup> Spickernagel set forth a similar claim based on a close iconographic study of rustic motifs, which she argues first emerged in the landscape backgrounds of fifteenth-century Flemish paintings and were widely employed in world landscape paintings. While this study provides an iconographic argument to support the argument made here about formulation of landscape as a vernacular genre, it ultimately fails to account for the new implications of the vernacular as a mode of expression first articulated in the *Small Landscapes*. See Spickernagel, "Die Descendenz der 'kleine Landschaften': Studien zur Entwicklung einer Form des Niederländischen Landschaftsbildes vor Pieter Bruegel", PhD diss., Westfälischen-Wilhelms-Universität (1972).



the ways that the vernacular was characterized when late medieval and early modern authors sought to validate it as a language of cultural expression.

### *The Language of the Vernacular*

The codification, inscription, and use of vernacular visual idioms took shape in tandem with, and perhaps in the reflection of, literary vernacular idioms. During the late medieval and early modern periods, theoretical and rhetorical treatises that explicitly sought to ennoble the vernacular multiplied across Europe. Writers and humanists championed the use and validity of vernacular languages for high literary purposes, praising its qualities of naturalness, simplicity, and immediacy. These qualities made the vernacular an especially direct and communicative medium, in contrast to the measured rigidity and formal ornamentation of the classical language of culture, Latin. More fundamentally, however, several writers acknowledged the vernacular to be mutable, contingent, and capable of constant self-renewal. In an important sense, this was seen to be its greatest virtue. In contrast to the artificiality, permanence, regularity, and universality of Latin, vernacular expression was always new and newly constituted through its very use. Ever changing and ever present, the vernacular made room for responsive innovation in a way that the set rules and ancient precedent of Latin could not.

The vernacular's link to the natural was forged in one of the earliest and most significant treatises on its merits. Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, written in the early fourteenth century, offers a reasoned defense of the suitability, and indeed the nobility, of the vernacular for the purposes of literary production, specifically poetry. Though written in Latin and not in his own 'volgare illustre', Dante poses a fundamental distinction between two types of language, the natural and the artificial, which would reverberate in theories of both the visual arts and literature throughout the early modern period. According to Dante, the vernacular may claim superiority to Latin precisely because it is not the result of man's art or reason. Instead it derives directly from nature: the vernacular mother tongue is known without effort and is employed without the mediation of thought. This stands in contrast to Latin, which, because it is governed by external rule and grammatical structure, must always be acquired through study, and therefore

remains secondary and artificial.<sup>25</sup> Though Dante argues, somewhat paradoxically, that in order to attain the beauty and nobility of Latin the natural qualities of the vernacular need to be tempered and ordered by the institution of rule and grammar, he touts the power of the natural and native vernacular as an instrument of direct communication.

Dante's efforts to validate the vernacular as an instrument of literary expression reverberated throughout Europe as the use of vernacular languages took firmer hold in the sixteenth century. While the call to impart order to vernacular languages according to the precedent of Latinate rule and grammar was widely echoed in literary and humanist circles, the implications of the equation of vernacular language with nature were elaborated by Michel de Montaigne, who explicitly rejected the premise that the vernacular requires the equivalent rigidity and order of Latin.<sup>26</sup> In his essay 'On Education', Montaigne argues that the simplicity of the vernacular, unconstrained by complex rules of grammar and composition, ensures its freedom from both artifice and affectation, and therefore offers a more transparent means of communication and a clearer path to truth.

It is, on the contrary, for words to follow and to serve: if French cannot get there, let Gascon do so. I want *things* to dominate, so filling the thoughts of the hearer that he does not even remember the words. I like the kind of speech which is simple and natural, the same on paper as on the lip [...] far from affectation [...] indifferent to artifice [...]. So we do well to lean toward the careless and natural.<sup>27</sup>

For Montaigne, words should be employed as a tool rather than as an art. He argues that 'all those "fine colors of rhetoric" are in fact easily eclipsed by the light of pure and naïve truth' that can be attained with the vernacular.<sup>28</sup> This suggests that the natural basis of the vernacular offers a sort of antistyle, neither necessitating nor accommodating classical conventions of ornamentation or artful elaboration that

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<sup>25</sup> Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, Cambridge Medieval Classics 5, ed. and trans. S. Botterill (Cambridge: 1996) 3. In note 1, Botterill specifies that here Dante refers to a literary Latin language "as written by the best poets" rather than to the many kinds of actual Latin then employed.

<sup>26</sup> Atkinson J., "Naïveté and Modernity: The French Renaissance Battle for a Literary Vernacular", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35 (1974) 179–196.

<sup>27</sup> Michel de Montaigne, "On Educating Children", in Screech M. (ed.), *The Complete Essays* (London: 2003) 193.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

merely draw attention to themselves and hinder the direct observation and communication of things and ideas.

The opposition that Dante and Montaigne set between the natural and the artificial finds an equivalent in the rhetoric of the visual arts as well. Perhaps best studied by modern scholars is Abraham Ortelius's tribute to Bruegel in his *Album Amicorum*.<sup>29</sup> Writing in Latin, Ortelius proposes that Nature herself might be responsible for the artist's untimely death because she was threatened by his skill at imitation. Ortelius further equates Bruegel and nature in his praise of his paintings, which he describes as 'not really [...] *artificiosae*, but rather natural. Indeed, I would not call him the best of painters, but rather the very nature of painters'. Ortelius goes on to explain that Bruegel could depict 'many things which are not able to be painted' and was free from the fault of attempting 'to add charm and grace' to his subjects. By comparison many artists who do attempt such embellishments 'completely destroy the image presented [...] and stray both from the exemplar set before them and from true form'.<sup>30</sup> Just as Montaigne advocates the use of a natural vernacular language capable of true communication, so too Ortelius's praise of Bruegel makes a similar move to equate his natural mode of visual expression with an ability to render true form and to picture phenomena that other, more artificial painters cannot.

An equally significant attribute of the vernacular is its instability. Precisely because vernacular language is shaped through use, it is subject to continual change and evolution. Dante himself acknowledged as much in his *Convivio*, written shortly before *De vulgari eloquentia*, where he once again opposes the vernacular to classical Latin.

Latin is eternal and incorruptible, while the vernacular is unstable and corruptible. Thus in the ancient Latin comedies and tragedies, which cannot undergo change, we find the same Latin as we have today; this is not the case with the vernacular, which, being fashioned according to one's own preference, undergoes change [...]. If those who departed this life a thousand years ago were to return to their cities, they would believe

<sup>29</sup> Puraye J. (ed.), *Album amicorum Abraham Ortelius* (Amsterdam: 1969) 21–22, f.12v.

<sup>30</sup> As translated in Freedberg D., *The Prints of Pieter Bruegel* (Tokyo: 1989) 65. See also the sensitive reading of this text in Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon* 173–182.

that they were occupied by foreigners, because the language would be at variance with their own.<sup>31</sup>

Montaigne expresses the same sentiment that his native French, which has changed by fifty percent in the course of his own lifetime, continues 'running away and changing form'.<sup>32</sup> The stability of Latin renders it impervious to time, permanent and implacable; vernacular language, rooted in use, is rendered unstable and contingent precisely because of its usage.<sup>33</sup> The price of the immediacy and transparency of the vernacular is its transience.

When measured against the standard of a universal Latin, the mutability of the vernacular might appear a detriment. However, from another perspective, it is a particular asset. Its ability to evolve means that the vernacular is always updating itself to current needs and circumstances. As one scholar has put it, the vernacular, 'continually renewing itself through current usage and exchange[...] has the capacity to transform itself into an agile instrument of colloquy between social groups and diverse regions'.<sup>34</sup> Montaigne, perhaps facetiously, recounts telling a friend to 'simply use the first words which came to his lips, Latin, French, Spanish, or Gascon, and stick an Italian ending on them' when traveling in Italy, in order to make oneself understood through a sort of accidental, improvised, common vernacular.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps more earnestly, Baldassare Castiglione proposed a similar model for a supraregional vernacular in his famous treatise *Il Cortegiano*. His favored vernacular was to be based on hybridity and integration, in which 'linguistic rules and language usage are defined in cultural exchange'.<sup>36</sup> Subject to neither spatial nor temporal fixity, this malleability of the vernacular assures its contemporariness and commutability.

<sup>31</sup> Dante, *The Convivio*, Book I, Chapter 5, trans. R. Lansing. Web. 10 June 2010. <<http://dante.ilt.columbia.edu/books/convivi/convivio.html#05>>.

<sup>32</sup> Montaigne, "On Vanity", in Screech (ed.), *The Complete Essays* 1111.

<sup>33</sup> Latin was of course in no way stable or incorruptible, especially in Dante's day.

<sup>34</sup> Marino J., "A Renaissance in the Vernacular: Baldassar Castiglione's Coining of the *aulic*", in Marino J. – Schlitt M. (eds.), *Perspectives on Early Modern and Modern Intellectual History: Essays in Honor of Nancy S. Struener* (Rochester: 2000) 148.

<sup>35</sup> Montaigne, "Apology of Raymond Sebond", in Screech (ed.), *The Complete Essays* 613; see Boutscher W., "Vernacular humanism in the sixteenth century", in Kraye J. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* (Cambridge: 1996) 195–196.

<sup>36</sup> Marino, "A Renaissance in the Vernacular" 152.

The vernacular thus possesses a uniquely generative potential. As a language from which others spring through use and exchange, the vernacular is particularly suited to innovation and invention.<sup>37</sup> For Montaigne, the vernacular stimulates invention. 'Unstudied, unplanned, careless, and accidental, the vernacular becomes an improvisational method enabling [Montaigne] [...] to see things that would not otherwise emerge in the conventions of ordered discourse'.<sup>38</sup> The vernacular quite literally makes it possible for Montaigne to observe the world through an unfixed frame and thereby to formulate new thoughts or even new categories of thought.

These considerations gleaned from the domain of literary expression corroborate the contours of the vernacular landscape imagery that we have already discussed. If we conceive of the vernacular as a method rather than a style, characterized by its capacity for transparent, immediate communication and inventive self-renewal, then its employment in the visual arts entails much more than issues of iconographic content or stylistic choice. Perhaps more than any other genre in Netherlandish practice, landscape was touted for its apparent directness and lack of artificiality, as well as for its capacity for innovation and variety, so that it came to be naturally twinned with the vernacular. But to what ends? Let us return to the *Small Landscapes* in order to examine how these vernacular landscapes are continually renewed through use, and how the instability and change inherent in the vernacular are transformed into the prints' most particular virtue.

### *The Use of the Vernacular Landscape*

After their initial publication in 1559 and 1561, the *Small Landscapes* went through a number of later editions. Though neither Hieronymus Cock nor his widow Volcxken Diericx reprinted the landscapes, the plates eventually passed into the possession of Philips Galle, Cock's successor as preeminent publisher in Antwerp, who issued an edition of the prints with a new title page in 1601. This was followed by two further undated editions – published by Galle's son Theodoor and his grandson Joannes – the latter of which likely appeared as late as the

<sup>37</sup> Lepsky G., "Mother Tongues and Literary Languages", *The Modern Language Review* 96 (2001) xxxiv.

<sup>38</sup> Marino, "A Renaissance in the Vernacular" 154.

mid-seventeenth century. Meanwhile in Amsterdam Claes Visscher, who staked much of his successful enterprise on publishing landscape prints, issued a set of twenty-four prints copied after the *Small Landscapes* in 1612, presumably because he could not obtain the original plates from the Galle family. The extended life and reach of the prints is not unique to the *Small Landscapes*. By their very nature, prints encourage republication and multiple editions. In the early modern period, prints were often issued again and again, the only technical limit to their production being the eventual wear to the copper plates and the resulting degradation of the printed impressions. Often it was the potential market for the prints that set a limit on the number and edition of prints produced. Publishers like Hieronymus Cock and Philips Galle made careful calculations about the commercial promise for every sort of print and print series they issued. The fact that the *Small Landscapes* were so often reprinted is evidence that these successive generations of publishers perceived a continued strong market for the images.

Yet the market for the *Small Landscapes* was not unchanging. Audiences in 1559 would have seen in the *Small Landscapes* something very different from those who encountered them almost one hundred years later. Each edition was shaped by and in turn gave shape to the specific historical circumstances of its time and place of publication. The flexibility and regenerative capacity of the *Small Landscapes* allowed each edition to meet the particular interests of these different contexts, ensuring their sustained viability over time and across space. Three of the publications of the *Small Landscapes* in particular highlight the radical shifts in significance that could obtain as a result of the changing use and function of the vernacular landscape: the original publication of the two series by Hieronymus Cock, the undated fourth edition of the prints issued by Joannes Galle, and Claes Visscher's copied set of twenty-four prints. Let us take them each in turn in order to explore the distinct ways the prints operated in these three separate contexts.

The original publication of the *Small Landscapes* in the middle of the sixteenth century coincided with a new and intense demand for actual land in the countryside immediately surrounding Antwerp. Urban residents of various socioeconomic ranks – wealthy foreign and local merchants, city officials, and successful artisans and craftsmen – purchased extensive estates and farms as well as smaller plots of land in the countryside; some of the wealthiest owned several large rural

properties.<sup>39</sup> In describing this phenomenon, historian Roland Baetens has characterized the powerful new urban influence in the rural hinterland as 'the colonization of the countryside'.<sup>40</sup> With the attention of Antwerp's citizens turned toward the immediate countryside as a site of acquisition and investment, the title page to the first series of the *Small Landscapes* reads almost like an advertisement for rural real estate, with the prints offering the viewer a catalogue of the sorts of properties these interested buyers might expect or hope to purchase.

Antwerp's residents turned to the countryside for a wide range of reasons. On the one hand, rural properties often served clear economic functions. They were sound investments that supplied stable rents and incomes. If the properties included agricultural estates and farms, they also provided regular yields from the harvest, whether in cash or in kind. In addition, particularly for foreign businessmen and merchants, they also offered a means of establishing and securing local credit that might be parlayed for other, often much riskier business transactions. On the other hand, the countryside offered salutary benefits as a place of retreat and relief from the oppressive atmosphere generated by the thriving urban metropolis. Townsfolk journeyed to nearby villages seeking a rural escape on weekends, holidays, and fair days. At the precise moment that the *Small Landscapes* were published, Antwerp's urbanites were acquiring *speelhuizen*, or recreational country houses, that served entirely as places of leisurely repose outside the city walls, in record numbers. When the number of existing country estates failed to meet demand, urban speculators and builders rushed to fill the gap, building entire new districts of suburban country estates

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<sup>39</sup> Soly and Limberger, respectively, give several examples of Antwerp residents with substantial country holdings. In a recent study, Limberger and Blondé have demonstrated that rural land values near Antwerp were the highest in all of Brabant, indicating the strong market for such properties. See Soly H., *Urbanisme en kapitalisme te Antwerpen in de 16de eeuw: De stedenbouwkundige en industriële ondernemingen van Gilbert van Schoonbeke* (Brussels: 1977) 60–64; Limberger M., *Sixteenth-Century Antwerp and its Rural Surroundings: Social and Economic Changes in the Hinterland of a Commercial Metropolis (ca. 1450–ca. 1570)*, *Studies in European Urban History* 14 (Turnhout: 2008) 196–199; and Blondé B – Limberger M., "Nieuwe geluiden en sterke tegenstellingen (1531–1629), De gebroken welvaart", in Uyten R. van et al. (eds.), *De geschiedenis van Brabant, van het hertogdom tot heden* (Zwolle: 2004) 319.

<sup>40</sup> Baetens R., "La 'Villa Rustica', Phénomène italien dans le paysage Brabançon au 16ème siècle", in *Aspetti della Vita Economica Medievale: Atti del Convegno di studi nel X Anniversario della Morte di Federico Melis, Firenze – Pisa – Prato, 10–14 marzo* (Florence: 1984) 174.



outside the city walls. Developer Gillis van Schoonbeke's *Leikwartier* just south of the city was one of the most ambitious. By 1570 the most distinguished of the new *speelhuizen* built there were in the hands of Antwerp's notable new merchant-gentlemen, including Nicolas Jongelinck, who housed his extraordinary collection of paintings by Pieter Bruegel and Frans Floris there.<sup>41</sup> The presence of these wealthy citizens – and their extensive art collections – in the *Leikwartier* clearly signals the reputation of the neighborhood and the social value that attached to its properties.

The purchase of rural properties was matched by a flood of new literary works in praise of country life. Petrarch had championed the retreat from the cares and duties of urban or courtly society in the fourteenth century, as did Erasmus, Antonio de Guevara, Justus Lipsius, and Montaigne in the sixteenth.<sup>42</sup> Many of these texts were known in Antwerp through local editions. Charles Estienne's more practical manual for running an efficient country estate, *L'Agriculture et la Maison Rustique*, was first published in Paris in 1564 and in Antwerp in a Dutch translation in 1566.<sup>43</sup> Though modeled on the example of ancient writers, Estienne's text was distinctly contemporary, answering to local audiences concerned with the particular natural terrain of the regions of France and Northern Europe.<sup>44</sup> In the preface to the Dutch edition, the publisher Christoph Plantin claims that he issued the book in response to a local demand for a version of the popular treatise that could be understood by people who 'were born in this

<sup>41</sup> Soly, *Urbanisme* 191.

<sup>42</sup> Francesco Petrarch, *The Life of Solitude*, Hyperion reprint ed. (Westport, CT: 1978); Thompson C. (ed.), *Collected Works of Erasmus, Literary and Educational Writings I: Antibarbari / Parabolae* (Toronto: 1978); Antonio de Guevara, *Menosprecio de Corte y Alabanza de Aldea* (Valladolid: 1539); Justus Lipsius, *A Discourse of constancy: in two books* (London, Humphrey Moseley: 1654); Montaigne, "On Solitude", in Screech (ed.), *The Complete Essays* 266–278. For several other examples of this genre of literature, see Smith P., *The Anti-Courtier Trend in Sixteenth-Century French Literature* (Geneva: 1966) 40–43.

<sup>43</sup> See *Les Travaux et les Jours dans l'ancienne France: Exposition organisée sous les auspices des Chambe d'Agriculture avec le concours du Musée national des Arts et des Traditions populaires* (Paris: 1939) 68–69.

<sup>44</sup> Estienne's ancient sources were the *scriptores rei rusticae*: Cato (234–149 BCE), Varro (116–27 BCE), Columella (first century CE), and Palladius (fourth century CE), all of whom wrote manuals on husbandry and farm management. These texts were often published together in large compendia during the sixteenth century. For a history of these publications in the sixteenth century, see Beutler C., "Un chapitre de la sensibilité collective: la littérature agricole en Europe continentale au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle", *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 28 (1973) 1280–1301.



Land and particularly here in Antwerp, who have their *speelhoven* out in the countryside'.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Plantin himself owned such an estate in the nearby village of Berchem, and composed his own epigram in praise of its virtues and pleasures.<sup>46</sup> His literary effort, together with the scores of other similar texts in circulation in Antwerp, reveals the extent of the urban investment in the rural countryside. Country properties functioned simultaneously as concrete economic ventures and as culturally constructed havens of leisure and retreat.

In light of the preoccupation of Antwerp's citizens with the countryside, Cock's publication of the *Small Landscapes* seems perfectly timed. Not only does the subject matter appear to record the very countryside that so preoccupied Antwerp's urbanites, but also the immediacy and naturalism of their presentation appears to guarantee their veracity [Fig. 1–4]. Whether for prospective buyers, weekend revelers, or armchair travelers, the prints offer a visual surrogate for the privileges and pleasures of the actual countryside at a time when these were amongst the most current and prevalent interests of the urban citizenry. The seemingly transparent presentation of the rural terrain, which allows immediate visual access to calm and controlled views, promotes a specifically urban perspective of the countryside as a site suitable for economic investment and spiritual renewal. Taken

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<sup>45</sup> The text of this passage in Dutch is as follows: 'But many who were born in this land, and especially here in Antwerp, and who have *speelhoven* out in the countryside complained that there were many words in the book that they did not understand well, and therefore they wasted their time and didn't enjoy it as they had hoped. These men bade me to translate the book into the Netherlandish language, citing for the greatest reason, that the average man who does not understand the French language got neither pleasure nor profit from the book (which is the greatest hope)'. In Dutch this passage reads: 'Maer vele van desen Lande geboren, ende besonder hier Tantwerpen, die buyten hen speelhouen hebben claechden, datter vele woorden int Boec waren, die sy ten besten niet en verstonden, ende alsoo en costen sy den tijtverdrijf, ende genoechte niet gehebben, als sy ghehoept hadden: Baden my daerom, dat icke inde Nederduytsche sprake wilde doen ouersetten, seggende voor een groote redene, dat den ghemeynen man de Fransoysche sprake niet verstaende (welc den meesten hoop is) gheen gheneuchte noch profijt wt dien boek en coste gehebben'. Charles Estienne, *De Landtwinninge ende hoeve van M. Kaerle Stevens* (Antwerp: Christoffel Plantin, 1566), dedication page.

<sup>46</sup> Scholars have connected Plantin's sonnet to Martial's epigram X, 47 and have traced its influence on later seventeenth-century Epicurian poems, including most notably the French poet Vauquelin's 'Sonnet de l'Epicurien'. See Sabbe M., *Le Sonnet de Plantin* (Antwerp: 1928); Masson G.-A. – Mongrédien G., 'Le Sonnet de Plantin', *La Revue Critique des Idées et des Livres* 29 (1920); and Rodríguez Moñino A., *El 'Avoir une Maison.' de Chr. Plantin y el 'Vitam quae faciant beatiorem.' de Marcial* (Madrid: 1932).

more broadly, the first edition of the *Small Landscapes* thematizes the increasingly complex relationship that was then taking shape between urban and rural constituencies and the shifting boundaries in play between urban and rural terrains. As urban populations and urban building projects pushed further out into the countryside, transforming formerly rural areas into suburban extensions of the city, and as rural denizens flocked to the city in search of employment and social advancement, the very categories of urban and rural were increasingly fraught and difficult to disentangle. In this light, Cock's publication of the *Small Landscapes* both reflects and intervenes in a larger set of social and cultural concerns of particular and immediate relevance to contemporary audiences. Though humble, these prints are not therefore without meaning or associative resonance. On the contrary, their direct simplicity and apparent artlessness allow them to speak all the more directly to the concerns of Antwerp's sixteenth-century audiences.

Given the contemporary resonances of the *Small Landscapes* in the middle of the sixteenth century, the fourth and final edition of the prints, published by Joannes Galle almost one hundred years later, is especially striking. In addition to organizational and minor editorial changes to the series, Galle also made several much more substantial changes. Small groups of figures were etched into twenty-three of the original forty-four plates. Many of these enhanced views are shockingly violent. In the reworked plate of Fig. 4, soldiers clash before the walls of a large farmhouse, while in the distance a peasant and his wife look on, witnesses to the slaughter in the foreground [Fig. 7]. The farm has become the site of a military skirmish, and the peasants are caught in its path. In another scene, a skirmish now takes place in the middle of a village road [Figs. 2 and 8]. A third reworked print has been modified to include a number of soldiers facing the wrath of the peasants after trying to make off with their property [Figs. 3 and 9]. In the middle ground, a peasant with a pitchfork drives a soldier with a musket from his barn, while in the foreground, another peasant has knocked a soldier to the ground with a wooden club. Two soldiers in the right and left corners of the foreground slip away from the scene, their arms and shoulders loaded with heavy sacks. Interspersed throughout the fourth edition, these aggressive scenes alternate with more serene vignettes, underscoring an impression of sporadic and arbitrary rural violence.

The logic behind these alterations to the original prints in the fourth edition can be connected with the changed fortunes of Antwerp and



Fig. 7. *Farms in a Court*, from *Small Landscapes* series published by Joannes Galle with additions (17th century).  
Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België, Prentenkabinet.





Fig. 8. *Village Street with Stacks of Hay*, from *Small Landscapes* series published by Joannes Galle with additions (17th century). Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België, Prentenkabinet.



Fig. 9. *Farm and Row of Houses*, from *Small Landscapes* series published by Joannes Galle with additions (17th century). Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België, Prentenkabinet.

its hinterlands in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. If the countryside was the locus of peace, prosperity, and repose in the middle of the sixteenth century, by the seventeenth it was viewed in a radically different light. Since 1566, the Southern Netherlands, and specifically the strategic region of Brabant in which Antwerp is located, had been embroiled in the long contest between the Spanish crown and the rebellious Northern Provinces. The countryside in particular suffered from the seemingly interminable conflict. Until the city's capitulation to the Duke of Parma Alexander Farnese, commander of the Spanish army, on August 17, 1585, the rural land and villages around Antwerp had been, quite literally, a battlefield. Even after the front lines of battle moved away from the immediate surrounds of Antwerp and the area began to recover, the war and especially the continued presence of soldiers remained an oppressive burden. As late as 1622 Frederik Hendrik, military leader of the Northern Provinces, led a battalion of Dutch troops on a rampage through the countryside of Brabant in an effort to raise *brandschattingen*, or forced contributions. Troops in the Spanish Army, which would disband and reform countless times over the decades of war, were a constant presence until the signing of a final peace at Munster in 1648. Whether officially billeted in towns and villages or set loose to plunder the countryside due to chronic shortages in provisions and lack of pay, soldiers burdened the lives of local inhabitants considerably.<sup>47</sup> Mutinies within the ranks of the army and, even more threatening, deserters and *vrijbuiters*, or freebooters, made conditions all the more precarious, with soldiers from both friendly and enemy camps demanding money, confiscating property, and ransacking houses and farms for food, clothing, and livestock.<sup>48</sup> These circumstances led to an outpouring of complaints and protests.

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<sup>47</sup> For the composition and habits of the Spanish Army, see Parker G., *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567–1659: The Logistics of Spanish Victory and Defeat in the Low Countries' Wars*. Cambridge Studies in Early Modern History (Cambridge: 1972). On habits of mutiny and plunder, see also Wijn J.W.W., *Het Krijgswezen in den Tijd van Prins Maurits* (Utrecht: 1934); as recorded in art, see Fishman J., *Boerenverdriet: violence between peasants and soldiers in early modern Netherlands art*, Studies in the Fine Arts: Iconography 5 (Ann Arbor: 1982).

<sup>48</sup> Parker, *Army of Flanders* 185–221; Cosemans A., “Het Uitzicht van Brabant op het einde der 16de eeuw”, *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis van het Hertogdom Brabant* 27 (1936) 285–351; Wijn J.W.W., “Krijgsbedrijven onder Frederick Henry”, in *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (Utrecht: 1953).



Countless testimonials from the time describe the wastage of the countryside, left untilled and unsown, and its desolated villages.<sup>49</sup>

As the countryside was no longer the placid idyll of economic bounty and spiritual rejuvenation, Joannes Galle's fourth edition of the *Small Landscapes* reconceived the representational value of the rural landscape, depicting it instead as a site marked by strife, danger, and suffering. Galle achieved this shift through the editorial changes to the plates that reshaped the content of the prints. Indeed, printmaking invites revision perhaps more than any other medium. However, the medium is not alone sufficient to explain Galle's revisions to the *Small Landscapes*. Rather, this technical capacity for change was matched with a significant conceptual realignment of the series. The immediacy of the *Small Landscapes* was undiminished by the passage of time, but it was marshaled now to register a fundamentally altered reality. The mutability and capacity for renewal – not only of the printmaking medium, but also of the landscape imagery itself – made it possible for Galle to update the rural views of the original *Small Landscapes* to reflect the current situation outside Antwerp. Rather than being a reissue of old prints, the fourth edition of these vernacular landscapes was very much of the present, even nearly a century after their first appearance. Their continued currency is evidenced by their ability to engage with the changed circumstances of the region and the radically different perspective from which cosmopolitan Antwerp audiences would have looked to the countryside around them. In this manner, the vernacular landscapes, updated to accord with present utility and contemporary concerns, found a new niche in the changed market of the mid-seventeenth century.

As a counterpoint and coda to these two very different uses and meanings of the *Small Landscapes* in mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth-century Antwerp, let us briefly consider one final context in which the prints operated. Claes Visscher's series of twenty-four copies

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<sup>49</sup> Later editions of Lodovico Guicciardini's *Descrittione* discuss the consequences of the war, as do other contemporary sources by Pieter Christiaenszoon Bor and Emanuel van Meteren. Secondary literature that deals with critiques of the circumstance of war include Sabbe M., *Brabant in't verweer: bijdrage tot de studie der Zuid-Nederlandsche strijdliteratuur in de eerst helft der 17<sup>e</sup> eeuw* (Antwerp: 1933); Blommaert P., *Politieke Balladen, Refereinen, Liederen en Spotgedichten der XVI eeuw* (Ghent: 1847); Vloten J. van, *Nederlandsche Geschiedzangen naar Tijdsorde Gerangschikt en Toegelicht* (Amsterdam: 1864); Baetens R., *De nazomer van Antwerpens welvaart: de diaspora en het handelshuis: de Groote tijdens de eerste helft der 17<sup>de</sup> eeuw* (Brussels: 1976) vol. 1, 36.

after the original *Small Landscapes* appeared in Amsterdam in 1612 with a title page that explicitly mentions that they are drawn from the Brabantine countryside.<sup>50</sup> The copies are slightly condensed, measuring around 10.3 by 15.8 cm, and have a softer, warmer quality due to Visscher's more supple etching style and the thicker, cottony foliage of the trees; otherwise, however, they follow the originals closely. Around the same time that Visscher published his copies of the *Small Landscapes*, he also produced editions of several other rural landscape series that had been published in Antwerp previously, for which he was able to purchase the plates.<sup>51</sup> This veritable flood of Flemish landscapes was matched by his own *Plaisante Plaetsen* series, probably issued in 1612 or 1613, based on topographically specific drawings that he had made in the rural surrounds of Haarlem about five years prior.<sup>52</sup> In the hands of Visscher, the *Small Landscapes* instigated not only a surge in the publication of landscape prints in general. They also offered a prototype for the development of local landscape prints specific to Holland and the Dutch Republic, which in turn laid the foundation for the local tradition of rustic landscape painting developed during the Dutch Golden Age.<sup>53</sup>

When Visscher imported the *Small Landscapes* to Holland, rural land and the landscape resonated in a manner distinct from their associations in Antwerp in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Here too urban citizens in Haarlem and Amsterdam sought out the country for its restful and refreshing qualities, buying country estates on the outskirts of the cities much as their counterparts in sixteenth-century

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<sup>50</sup> Scheffer D. (ed.), *Hollstein's Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts ca. 1450–1700, Volume 38* (Roosendaal: 1991) 144, nos. 292–317; Gibson W., *Pleasant Places: The Rustic Landscape from Bruegel to Ruisdael* (Berkeley: 2000) 41–42, with further references.

<sup>51</sup> See Gibson, *Pleasant Places* 27–49, which provides a useful overview of Visscher's various publishing ventures and of the various other artists and publishers involved in this enterprise. It also sets Visscher's achievement within the broader emergence of rustic landscape in all media.

<sup>52</sup> There are five surviving drawings for the series, all dated 1607. On these and the printed series, see Luijten G. – Suchtelen A. van et al. (eds.), *Dawn of the Golden Age: Northern Netherlandish Art, 1580–1620* (Zwolle: 1993) 650–652, cat. nos. 324 and 326.

<sup>53</sup> Several important exhibition catalogues have dealt with the emergence of Dutch landscape prints in great depth, including: Brown C., *Dutch Landscape: The early years, Haarlem and Amsterdam 1590–1650* (London: 1986); Luiten G. – Suchtelen A. van et al. (eds.) *Dawn of the Golden Age*; and Bakker B. – Leeftang H., *Nederland naar 't leven: Landschapsprenten uit de Gouden Eeuw* (Amsterdam: 1993).



Antwerp had done. Yet the valence of both the countryside and representations of it were unique to the Dutch cultural context.<sup>54</sup> The signing of the Twelve Years' Truce between the United Provinces and the Spanish crown in 1609 effectively sanctioned an independent Dutch state for the first time after the protracted military campaigns of the Dutch revolt. The complex enterprise of Dutch national self-definition took shape as the newfound political autonomy and economic and cultural ascendancy of the Northern Provinces grew during the truce.

While the particular meanings of Dutch landscape imagery have been hotly contested by scholars,<sup>55</sup> the unique historical position of the United Provinces meant that land was anything but neutral. Catherine Levesque has argued that Dutch landscape prints, especially Visscher's series, embody a spectrum of connotations and meanings that sprang first and foremost from the sense of history and community and the desire for prosperity and freedom taking shape in Holland and the Northern Provinces in the early years of independence.<sup>56</sup> Tied up with

<sup>54</sup> On the habits of country life and country estates in the United Provinces in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including how they related to contemporary literature and garden construction, see Jong E. de, *Nature and Art: Dutch Garden and Landscape Architecture, 1650–1740*, trans. Anne Langenakens, Penn Studies in Landscape Architecture (Philadelphia: 2000) 3–17.

<sup>55</sup> See Bengtsson A., *Studies in the Rise of Realistic Landscape Painting in Holland 1610–1625* (Uppsala: 1952). For scriptural readings of Dutch landscapes, see Brown J., "Toward a Scriptural Reading of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Landscape Painting", in Sutton P. et al. (eds.) *Masters of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Landscape Painting* (Boston: 1987) 84–103; and as revised in Falkenburg R., "De betekenis van het geschilderde Hollandse landschap van de zeventiende eeuw: Een beschouwing naar aanleiding van enkele recente interpretaties", *Theoretische Geschiedenis* 16 (1989) 131–153. For broader cultural and associative understandings of Dutch landscapes, see Schama S., "Culture as Foreground", in *Masters of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Landscape Painting* (Boston: 1987) 64–83; Haverkamp Begemann E. – Chong A., "Dutch Landscape painting and its associations", in Hoetink H.R. (ed.), *The Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis* (Amsterdam: 1985) 56–67; Levesque C., *Journey through Landscape in Seventeenth-Century Holland: The Haarlem Print Series and Dutch Identity* (University Park, PA: 1994); and Levesque C., "Landscape, Politics, and the Prosperous Peace", *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 48 (1997) 222–257. More recently, Falkenburg has argued that meaning in landscapes consists of 'a "field" of semantic potential which is "triggered" by the image as well as by the expectations and experiences of the audience'. See Falkenburg R., "Calvinism and the Emergence of Dutch Seventeenth-Century Landscape Art: A Critical Evaluation", in Finney P. (ed.) *Seeing Beyond the Word: Visual Arts and the Calvinist Tradition* (Cambridge: 1999) 343–368.

<sup>56</sup> Levesque, *Journey Through Landscape* 41, argues that there was an explicit connection between Visscher's own landscape prints series and the sixteenth-century *Small Landscapes*, among others, but stresses that 'Visscher's scenes, though rooted in this tradition, reflect new values and preoccupations.' I would argue that in his copies, the *Small Landscapes* themselves embody these new values. See also Onuf A.,

the challenges of independence and nation building, landscape spoke to strong currents of civic and national pride. The radical growth of Dutch towns and cities in the prosperous peace that emerged after decades of war was supported by the increase in rural industries. At the same time that urbanites cultivated the countryside as a place newly reclaimed as a spot for leisure and pleasure, the countryside also served as a site of historical record, where ruins like the Huis ter Kleef, eulogized in poetry, paintings, and prints alike, stood as a testament to the recent war and hard-won independence.<sup>57</sup> The multivalence of the rural terrain charged landscape imagery with a wide spectrum of associative values for Dutch audiences, many of which were rooted in the specific historical formation and projected future of the newly independent Dutch state.

It might seem counterintuitive to suggest that the *Small Landscapes* – which, after all, claimed in their original accompanying title page to represent the local Flemish landscape – played a key role in the development of an equally localized representation of the Dutch countryside. This is not, however, a convenient elision due to the geographic contiguity of these regions. Visscher's copies of the *Small Landscapes* were instrumental to the formulation of the local Dutch idiom of landscape not because they represented the Dutch countryside, which they did not purport to do even in Visscher's copies. Rather, it is their method of presenting the local landscape that made these humble prints compelling to Visscher and to the generations of landscape printmakers and painters who followed. Visscher's copies of the *Small Landscapes* provided a model through which Dutch audiences learned to frame their own local environment, and in so doing the older prints evolved, as they had in seventeenth-century Antwerp, to the new circumstances in which they were made to function. They remained local Flemish landscapes in their copied form, exhibiting the same immediacy and apparent naturalism as the original edition. Their utility in giving visual form to new cultural forces springs from the inherent flexibility of their vernacular mode. As such, Visscher issued his

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"Envisioning Netherlandish Unity: Claes Visscher's 1612 Copies of the *Small Landscape Prints*", *Journal of the Historians of Netherlandish Art* 3, 1 (2011). Web. 18 June 2011. <<http://www.jhna.org/>>.

<sup>57</sup> Leeftang H., "Dutch Landscape: The Urban View. Haarlem and Its Environs in Literature and Art, Fifteenth-Seventeenth Century", *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 48 (1997) 53–115; and Gibson, *Pleasant Places* 66–116.

copies of the *Small Landscapes* as images with present relevance, inextricable from the concerns, desires, tastes, and ambitions ascendant in their new place and time of publication, as witnessed by his own quick publication of a pendant series of *Plaisante Plaetsen* (Pleasant Places) from around Haarlem. In fact, this generative reframing of the original prints demonstrates the most essential aspect of the vernacularity of the *Small Landscapes*.

The *Small Landscapes* participate in a visual vernacular that can be understood on several levels. On perhaps the most evident level, the prints depict views of the rural countryside around Antwerp. In their localized specificity, they make no pretense to expansive grandeur or universal scope, instead depicting a consciously limited native terrain. Their unassuming subject matter is matched by a descriptive treatment characterized by naturalism and simplicity, giving viewers the impression of immediate, unimpeded visual access to the landscapes. They are direct and ordinary, without any of the idealized artistry or rigorous compositional structure associated with classicizing styles. Audiences are therefore perhaps all the more willing to accept the premise that the views were drawn from life, and that they reflect the true topography of the countryside and nature itself as recorded by the artist's quick, unthinking hand. Furthermore, the very genre of landscape was firmly established as a Northern specialty by the time the *Small Landscapes* were first published. The supposed naturalism of the prints was thereby overdetermined, being a characteristic routinely associated with Northern landscapes generally and highlighted specifically in the 1559 title page of the *Small Landscapes*.

It might be sufficient to explain the vernacular nature of the *Small Landscapes* on the basis of their content and style, but such criteria presume that the prints are singular, fixed, and constant both in their appearance and their significance. On the contrary, this essay has sought to demonstrate that the *Small Landscapes* were anything but static, as they were republished, reworked, and copied in the century after their initial publication. The prints have a rich diachronic history that is marked not by constancy, but by constant renewal and regeneration. With each appearance, the *Small Landscapes* reengage with changing cultural and historical circumstances, sustaining distinct meanings for audiences with different experiences. The prints are reconstituted in successive iterations, always contingent, dependent on and responsive to their use. As the *Small Landscapes* demonstrate, the vernacular transcends motif, form, and style, shaping instead a

more fundamental conceptual logic of pictorial expression. Rather than a fixed category, the vernacular is by its very nature always in the process of formation, shaped through the constant dialogue of usage and application. These landscape prints, developed within a genre that had already been theorized as indigenous and marked by its capacity for innovation and variation, are fluid and mutable, rooted in specific locality while susceptible to translocation and alteration. Renewed and updated, they provide a visual mode of vernacular expression that continued to communicate with immediacy and directness throughout the early modern period.

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### III. IDENTITIES





# ALS ICH CAN: HOW JAN VAN EYCK EXTENDED THE VERNACULAR FROM DUTCH POETRY TO OIL PAINTING

Jamie L. Smith

## Introduction

In this paper, I identify vernacular origins of the Dutch motto *Als ich can* (as best as I can) (Fig. 1), which Jan van Eyck (b. Maaseyck ca. 1390,<sup>1</sup> d. Brugge 1441) inscribed on his self-portrait<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 2),

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<sup>1</sup> The date of van Eyck's birth is uncertain. Estimates have ranged from 1370 to 1400. Because he is documented to have served as court painter at The Hague from 1422 to 1424, and, in 1425 was appointed as *valet de chambre* to Philip the Good, I agree with the theory that he was born around 1390. See Dhanens E., *Hubert and Jan van Eyck* (New York: 1980) 19. The sixteenth-century Italian art historian, Giorgio Vasari, erroneously identified van Eyck as the inventor of oil painting. See *Northern Renaissance Art 1400–1600. Sources and Documents*, ed. W. Stechow (Evanston: 1989) 6–8. Though he did not invent oil colors, it may be argued that van Eyck refined the medium and mastered its technique. It is my assertion that, as he made these innovations, he also formulated conceptual foundations for the art.

<sup>2</sup> Many art historians have identified *Man in a Red Turban* as van Eyck's self-portrait: Panofsky E., *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character*, Volume I (New York-Hagerstown-San Francisco-London: 1971) 198; Davies M., *The National Gallery London. Les Primitifs Flamands; Corpus de la peinture des anciens Pays-Bas méridionaux au quinzième siècle*, 3 (Antwerp-Brussels: 1954) 129–132, no. 48; Scheller R.W., “*Als Ich Can*,” *Oud Holland* 83 (1968) 135–139; Vos D. de, “Nogmaals ALS ICH CAN,” *Oud Holland* 97 (1983) 1–4; Dhanens, *Hubert and Jan van Eyck* 188–192. Weale suggests that *Man in a Red Turban* depicts van Eyck's father-in-law. Weale W.H.J., *Hubert and John Van Eyck: Their Life and Work* (London-New York: 1908) 76, Plate IV. Weale's theory was later reiterated. Künstler G., “Jan van Eyck's Wahlwort ‘*Als Ich Can*’ und das Flügelaltarchen in Dresden,” *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 25 (1972) 107–27 (especially 115). This hypothesis has been dismissed convincingly: “the basis for this identification, namely a slight physiognomical similarity between the sitter in a red turban and Margaret Van Eyck in her 1439 portrait is actually so slight that his proposal has received little support from other scholars. The fact is, we have absolutely no idea what her father looked like”. Heath P., “Justice and Mercy: The Patron of Van Eyck's Dresden Triptych,” *Apollo* (March 2008) 106–113 (quotation at p. 112). The consensus among recent scholarly analyses is that *Man in a Red Turban* is a self-portrait. Lorne Campbell argued that van Eyck inscribed his motto in a position he reserved in other portraits for the sitter's identification and asserted that the intense focus of the sitter's eyes indicates close scrutiny of his visage in a mirror. Campbell L., *The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Schools*, exh. cat., National Gallery, London (London: 1998) 214–216. Several scholars who agree with this position have argued, moreover, that van Eyck embedded images of



Fig. 1. Jan van Eyck, *Man in a Red Turban (Self-Portrait)*, detail (1433). Oil on wood. London, The National Gallery. Image © The National Gallery, London

and several other paintings.<sup>3</sup> Robert Scheller related *Als ich can* to the antique expression *ut potui, non sicut volui* (as I could, not as I wished), likening the motto's orthography to copied texts containing anagrams of scribes' names.<sup>4</sup> This widely accepted argument has given rise to interpretations akin to Elisabeth Dhanens's claim that the painter adopted 'an ancient formula so as to reflect both his humility and his pride'.<sup>5</sup> Despite observations that the phrase resembles contemporary Dutch expressions, the significance of its vernacular

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himself in larger compositions, including the *Arnolfini Double Portrait*, the *Van der Paele Madonna*, the *Rolin Madonna*, and the *Ghent Altarpiece*. See Ridderbos B-Van Buren A.-Van Veen H. (eds.) *Early Netherlandish Paintings: Rediscovery, Reception, and Research* (Amsterdam: 2005) 67–68; Smith P.H., *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago-London: 2004) 7, 41; and Koerner J.L., *The Moment of Self Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago-London: 1996) 108–109. Furthermore, Campbell and Dhanens both cite a document, dated 1769, in the archive of the Bruges Painters' Guild, that records the location of van Eyck's portrait of his wife, Margaret, in the guild chapel and notes that the 'pendant' to this picture was claimed to have been stolen. (Descamps J.-B., *Voyage pittoresque de la Flandre et du Brabant* (Paris: 1769) 306–307. Campbell and Dhanens argue that the 'pendant' was a self-portrait, *Man in a Red Turban*. See: Campbell, *The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Schools* 217, note 27; and Dhanens, *Hubert and Jan Van Eyck* 189, 190, 302–304.

<sup>3</sup> Other works inscribed with *Als ich can* are: *The Virgin and Child at the Fountain*, 1439, in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp; workshop replica, ca. 1440, in the Robert Noortman collection, Maastricht; the *Triptych*, 1437, in the Gemäldegalerie, Dresden; and *Margaret van Eyck*, 1439, in the Groeningemuseum, Brugge. The motto appears on these copies of van Eyck's works: *Virgin and Child (Ince Hall Madona)*, 1433, in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; the *Holy Face* of 1438, in Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin; and the *Holy Face* of 1440, in the Groeningemuseum, Brugge. On the later use of a similar motto by the German painter Conrad Laib, see Kemperdick S., "De Eerst Generatie", in *Van Eyck tot Dürer. De Vlaamse Primitieven & Centraal-Europa 1430–1530*, ed. T-H Borchert, exh. cat., Brugge: Groeningemuseum (Brugge: 2010) 55–53.

<sup>4</sup> Scheller, "Als Ich Can" 135–139.

<sup>5</sup> Dhanens, *Hubert and Jan van Eyck*, 180, states: 'R.W. Scheller has correctly placed it within the framework of an old tradition among writers and copyists, based on the antique formula *ut potui, non sicut volui* (as I could, not as I wished)'. Also see de Vos, "Nogmaals ALS ICH CAN"; and Campbell, *The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Schools* 214–215.



Fig. 2. Jan van Eyck, *Man in a Red Turban (Self-Portrait)* (1433). Oil on wood, 33.1 × 25.9 cm including frame. London, The National Gallery. Image © The National Gallery, London

correspondence has yet to be considered.<sup>6</sup> Middle Dutch authors strove to distinguish their writing from the French literary style then fashionable at courts in the Low Countries.<sup>7</sup> Toward this end, poets often prefaced texts with pledges that their Dutch verses were based on valid sources and were free of stylistic extravagance. Adapting such a statement to his paintings, van Eyck aligned himself not with the practice of classical copyists encoding their names, but, rather, with the tradition of regional authors avowing the validity of their methods. The motto provides a key to understanding conceptual foundations van Eyck instituted for oil painting. As he created a new formal mode, which engendered truth, clarity, and understanding, he distinguished his art from prevalent French styles of panel painting and manuscript illumination. He thereby extended vernacular discourse from Dutch literature to oil painting and shaped a distinctive identity for pictorial art in the Netherlands.

So ic best mach: *The Role of Jacob van Maerlant's Prologues in Middle Dutch Criticism*

The leader of vernacular literary proponents in the Netherlands was Jacob van Maerlant (fl. West Flanders, 1235–1293). He was lauded posthumously by the prominent fourteenth-century Antwerp poet Jan Boendale as ‘the father of all Dutch poets’ (‘die vader der dietscher

<sup>6</sup> Sixteenth-century Antwerp artist Jacob de Gheyn II used the phrase *wat ick vermach*: Scheller, “*Als Ich Can*” 135. *So ic best can* appears in Jacob van Maerlant’s *Spiegel Historiael*. Also see de Vos, “Nogmaals ALS ICH CAN” 1, 3, note 3. Also see Comer J., “Conrad Laib kan het,” *Kontaktblad Gidsenbond Brugge & West-Vlaanderen*, 32,2 (March – April 2011) 26–27.

<sup>7</sup> For the comparison of Dutch literary developments with the French tradition see Lie O.S., “What is Truth? The Verse-Prose Debate in Medieval Dutch Literature”, [www.dbnl.org/tekst/lie\\_002what01/lie\\_002what01\\_001.htm](http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/lie_002what01/lie_002what01_001.htm) March 12, 2005. Also see Van Oostrom F.P., *Court and Culture: Dutch Literature 1350–1450*, trans. A.J. Pomerans (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: 1992); originally published as *Het woord van eer. Literatuur aan het Hollandse hof omstreeks 1400* (Amsterdam: 1987) 1–23. Maerlant’s anti-French literary approach paralleled political aspirations that led the Flemish to oppose the French in the Guldensporenslag in 1302 and at the Battle of Pevelenberg in 1304. Although I do not consider van Eyck’s motivation to implement critical precepts from Dutch poetry to have been primarily political, I find no reason to assume that fifteenth-century Netherlandish painters were less eager than their literary predecessors to distinguish their work stylistically from prevalent French traditions. Stylistic contradistinction as a marker of regional cultural identity, along with other factors, may have contributed to oil painting’s rapid rise in popularity in the Netherlands.

dictren es algader').<sup>8</sup> Asserting that Maerlant 'differed sharply from liars who propagated false material' ('Scelse sere die logheneren, Die valsche materien viseren'), Boendale alludes to his predecessor's selective reliance on trusted authorities.<sup>9</sup> This orientation is evident in the prologue to Maerlant's bestiary, *Der naturen bloeme*, ca. 1270,<sup>10</sup> wherein he criticizes Willem Utenhove for basing his natural digest on a French text instead of on a Latin source:

However, I know that one was made by Willem Utenhove, a priest of Aardenburg, of great repute. But he missed the mark because he composed it from the French. Because of this he was easily misled and failed to present the truth. But the exemplar that I have used, is from brother Albert of Cologne, who is rightfully called Flower of Science: on him I can truly rely.<sup>11</sup>

In his criticism of Utenhove, Maerlant directly sounds his distrust of French sources, yet, elsewhere he implies this attitude by disparaging the French tradition of knightly romances.<sup>12</sup> In his prologue to the *Spiegel Historiael* (*Mirror of History*), ca. 1285, he proclaims, "Those who tire of the prevarications about the Grail, the lies about Perceval, and all those other false tales, let them choose this *Spiegel Historiael* above the ridiculous stories about Lanval; for here one finds truth and

<sup>8</sup> Boendale J., *Der leken spiegel*, Book III, ch. cxxvj, folio 125<sup>r</sup>, column b, lines 119–120. Edition: *Der leken spiegel, leerdicht van den jare 1330, door Jan Boendale, gezegd Jan de Clerc, schepenclerk te Antwerpen*. 3 dln. (Leiden: 1844–1848) 8. CD-Rom Middel Nederlands (The Hague-Antwerp: 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. ch. cxxvi, folio 125<sup>r</sup>, column b, lines 121–122.

<sup>10</sup> Maerlant J. van, *Der naturen bloeme*, ed. M. Gysseling, *Corpus van Middelnederlandse teksten (tot en met het jaar 1300)*. Reeks II: Literaire handschriften. Deel 2, *Der Naturen Bloeme* ('s-Gravenhage: 1981) prologue, lines 101–103. CD-Rom Middel Nederlands. Translation by O. Lie, "What is Truth", 43.

<sup>11</sup> Maerlant, J. van, *Der naturen bloeme*, Prologue, lines 104–116: "nochtan wetic wel dat waer is / dat dar willem huten hou / een priester van goeden loue / van erdenborch: enen heuet ghemaket / mar hi waser in ontraket / want hine huten walsche dichte / dies wart hi ontlede lichte / ende heuet dat ware begheuen / mar daric dit hute ebbe bescreuen / ebbic / van broeder albrechte / van colne diemen wel met rechte / hetet bloeme van der clergien / vp hem dar ix conlike lien." Maerlant incorrectly attributed Thomas van Cantimpré's Latin prose encyclopedia on natural history, *De naturis rerum*, to Albertus Magnus. See Lie, "What is Truth" 43, whose translation is presented above. To my knowledge, Utenhove's French source remains unidentified.

<sup>12</sup> Maerlant's attitude is not to be construed as antichivalric (nor do I wish to suggest that van Eyck's pictorial imagery contains antichivalric themes). Maerlant addresses chivalric themes and subjects in several texts, such as his accounts of the Grail legend. Yet the poet did vehemently reject certain versions of chivalric stories that he considered to be based on dubious sources and written in an unrestrained poetic style.



many a marvel, wisdom and good teachings and pure pastime'.<sup>13</sup> A chapter on Charlemagne is titled 'Diatribes against the liars' ('T'scelden jeghen den borderers'). The opening lines indicate that Maerlant considered the selection of valid content to operate interactively with stylistic judgment: 'Here I have to answer the liars, who kill truthful stories with beautiful rhymes and with beautiful tales. Because the words sound well and the material is nice and lucid, they present them as truthful stories'.<sup>14</sup> In this text and others, he rejects poetic fabrication in favor of the clear interpretation of reliable authorities.

In the prologue to *Sinte Franciscus leven*, ca. 1275, a translation of Bonaventure's life of St. Francis of Assisi, *Legenda maior*, into Dutch verse, Maerlant criticizes romances as 'fables' ('favele') about knights and dismisses them as 'trifles' ('truffe') on love and battles.<sup>15</sup> He explains, 'Just as brother Bonaventure composed the poem in Latin, [likewise] I will follow him with haste, as well and as accurately as I can'.<sup>16</sup> The poet conveys with the terms *naest* (near, close) and *heest* (haste) that he constructs Dutch verses with brevity and cleaves to the meaning of Bonaventure's Latin text. In his declaration 'so ic best mach' Maerlant avows that he does his best to predicate this Dutch biography upon a thorough understanding of its Latin source and to exercise stylistic restraint in following that authoritative text.

In 1330, Boendale calibrated Maerlant's philosophy in a widely circulated layman's encyclopedia, *Der leken spiegel* (*The Layman's Mirror*).

<sup>13</sup> Maerlant J. van, *Spiegel historiael*, eds. M. de Vries en E. Verwijs: *Jacob van Maerlant's Spiegel historiael, met de fragmenten der later toegevoegde gedeelten, bewerkt door Philip Utenbroeke en Lodewijc van Velthem*. 3 delen. (Leiden: 1863) Prologue, lines 55–64: 'Dien dan die boerde vanden Grale, / Die lohene van Perchevale, / Ende andere vele valscher saghen / Vernoyen ende niet en behaghen, / Houde desen Spiegle Ystoriale / Over die truffen van Lenvale; / Want hier vintmen al besonder / Waerheit ende menech wonder, / Wisjsheit ende scone leringhe, / Ende reine dachcortinghe'. CD-Rom Middelnerlands. Translation by Lie, "What is Truth" 41–42.

<sup>14</sup> Maerlant J. van *Spiegel historiael*, IV, I, ch. 29, lines 1–6: 'Hier moetic den borderes antwoorden, / Die vraye ystorien vermorden / Met sconen rime, met scoenne tale. / Omdat die worde luden wale, / Entie materie es scone ende claer, / So doen sise verstaen vor waer'. Translation by Lie, "What is Truth" 42.

<sup>15</sup> Maerlant J. van, *Sinte Franciscus Leven*, Prologue, folio 1<sup>r</sup>, column a, lines 33–38. Edition: *Sinte Franciscus Leven van Jacob van Maerlant*, 2 dln., ed. P. Maximilianus, Zwolse drukken en herdrukken voor de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letter kunde te Leiden, 7 (Zwolle: 1954). "Boerderer" line 47; "favele" line 50. CD-Rom Middelnerlands.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Prologue, folio 1<sup>r</sup>, column b, lines 87–90: 'Also als broeder Bom aventure / Int latijn heeft gedicht ter cure, / So ic best mach ende naest, / Salic hem volgen metter haest'. Translation by the author and Gerard Bouwmeester.

In a chapter titled 'Hoe dichters dichten sullen ende wat si hantieren sullen' ('How poets should write and what they should pay attention to'), he set forth three qualifications for authors: 'grammarijn' (a Latin education), 'waerechteheide' (truthfulness), and 'eersam van levene' (an honorable way of living).<sup>17</sup> Boendale's parameters are consistent with Maerlant's consultation of Latin texts and his advocacy of 'good teachings and pure pastimes' provided by 'truthful stories'. *Waerechteheide* applied to both the validity of Maerlant's source material and the unembellished manner in which he rendered it into verse. Though his life of St. Francis, like other of his works, contains moral examples, one hesitates to speculate that the author followed these lessons himself. Nonetheless, Maerlant's writing style may have been judged to reflect Boendale's third requisite, *eersam van levene*. This argument is supported by advice given to a nun by the Flemish spiritual leader Jan van Ruusbroec (fl. 1291–1381), 'If someone asks you about something you know, answer with the briefest and clearest [words] as best you can'.<sup>18</sup> The theologian's encouragement of the sparing and modest use of language indicates that, in their application beyond literary circles, habits of verbal clarity and brevity were considered to be attributes of moral rectitude.

The moral dimension of Dutch vernacular style comprised a salient critical component of devotional literature.<sup>19</sup> Maerlant's influence is

<sup>17</sup> Boendale, *Der leken spiegel*, Book III, Ch. CXXVI, lines 11–13. Translations: Lie, "What is Truth" 54. Boendale's codification of these principles offers a comprehensive paradigm for further assessment of Maerlant's assimilation of vernacular sources. The poet was well educated in Latin grammar. See Oostrom F. van, *Maerlants Wereld* (Amsterdam: 1996) 31–46. According to Boendale's specifications, Maerlant's education provided a sound basis for learned judgment and, therefore, legitimized his selective use of a variety of sources.

<sup>18</sup> The phrase occurs in Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, B.P.L. 2692, ll. 452–493: 'Vraecht men u iet dat u condech es, soe antwert met den corten ende clærsten als best cont.' Another version contains the variation 'met den clærsten die ghi geleisten cont'. Van Ruusbroec J., *Vanden Seven Sloten*, trans. G. de Baere, ed., H. Rolfson (Turnhout: 1989) *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis*, CII, 71–72, 149, verse 469. Van Ruusbroec addressed Brussels Clare Margareta van Meerbeke 1346–1358 (pp. 17–19). That his advice – 'keep your eyes downcast, look no one straight in the face' ('soe siet vore u nederweert ende en merct niemen in sijn ansijn' (ibid. 148, lines 434–435 and 149, line 458) – was accepted in secular culture and may have informed portraiture is evident in Rogier van der Weyden's *Portrait of a Woman*, ca. 1465, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

<sup>19</sup> Religious authorities were highly esteemed sources. Boendale and the anonymous translator of *Jesus Sidrach* revered St. Jerome's Bible translation as an exemplar of true, accurate writing. Lie, "What is Truth" 54.

evident in the prologue to an anonymous life of Jesus in verse, *Vanden levene ons Heren* (*On the Life of our Lord*), ca. 1280. Echoing the prologue to *Sinte Franciscus leven*, the author denounces ‘trifles and idle pastimes’ (‘Om horen truffe ende ledichede’) ‘about battles and love’, which are of ‘little benefit to one’s soul’ (‘*Die ter zielen luttel smaect / Van battalien ende van minnen*’).<sup>20</sup> In the prologue of the Passion poem ‘Ons Heren Passie’ (‘Our Lord’s Passion’), 1440–1450, another anonymous author criticizes a previous version of his subject:

Although it [i.e., the life of Jesus Christ] was already composed in verse before, it was not done to the effect that it earned my satisfaction. I shall write you the reasons for this: it was much too long in my opinion. I shall prove it to you with [verses from] the beginning [of the older version]: ‘When God in Simon’s house was residing / and to his disciples was preaching and reading.’ This last verse has only been placed for the sake of rhyme. Against this way [of rhyming], I will take heed, as best as I can.<sup>21</sup>

‘As best as I can’ (‘na mijn vermoeden’) approximates Maerlant’s expression ‘as well as I can’ (‘so ic best mach’). The unknown writer, like his famous contemporary, promised to do his best to present his subject without unnecessary longwindedness or poetic indulgence. He preempts criticism of his use of poetic form, instead of prose, by arguing his poem’s validity on the basis of its closeness to his Latin source: ‘Some people exist who criticize the verse form and say that it is incapable of conveying the essential meaning in a succinct and precise way. I invite these people to confront the Latin text with these verses and to speak their minds if they notice a great difference’.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Vanden Leven Ons Heren*, Deel I, ed. W.H. Beuken (Zwolle: 1968) 9, lines 6–7, 20. Translations: Lie, “What is Truth” 57.

<sup>21</sup> Verdam J., “De tekst van Ons heren passie”. In: *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse taal- en Letterkunde* 25 (1906) 206–240 (pp. 211–236, lines 23–34): Al isset eens in rijm ghemaect, / Ten is nochtan so niet gheraect; / Dat ic daer mede bin te vreden. / Ic sel iu scriven bi wat reden: / Het dunct mi wesen veel te lanc, / Dat ic bewijs in deerst inganc; / ‘Doe god in Symons huse was / End hi sijn jonghers preec end las’: / Dit leste vers is slechts gheset, / Om datted rimen sel te bet. / Voer die manier wil ic mi hoeden / In dit ghedicht na mijn vermoeden’. CD-Rom Middelnederlands. Translation: Lie, “What is Truth” 57.

<sup>22</sup> Verdam, “De tekst van Ons heren passie,” 190–236, lines 77–82: ‘Som menschen sijn die rimen laken / End segghen dat si niet en raken / Te recht de synne cort end fijn / Dien bid ic, dat si doch tlatijn / Mit desen rime overleggehn, / End sceel si veel, dat sijt dan segghen’. CD-Rom Middelnederlands. Translation: Lie, “What is Truth” 58.





Fig. 3. Anonymous (West Flemish) Prayer book, detail (15th century).  
Parchment. Brugge, Grootseminarie ter Brugge MS. 72–175, fol. 13r.  
Image © Grootseminarie ter Brugge

The statements above profile a growing state of self-awareness among authors who stimulated a dynamic critical climate in Dutch literature. Principles they cultivated were disseminated to the laity, not only in Boendale's layman's guide, but also through prayer books. The prologue (Fig. 3) of a fifteenth-century West Flemish prayer book, now at the Grootseminarie ter Brugge, states: 'But because that many people, [Are like one] who does not understand Latin, Does not know what he is praying and what he is doing, However his intention is good, So I have, by the grace of God, Composed the text in Dutch as best as I could'.<sup>23</sup> It is likely that this unknown author was familiar with

<sup>23</sup> Grootseminarie ter Brugge (GSB) MS. 72–175, folio 13r. Edition: *Dietsche Rime, Geestelijke Gedichten uit de XIII<sup>e</sup>, XIV<sup>e</sup> & XV<sup>e</sup> Eeuw Naar een HS. van het einde der XV<sup>e</sup> Eeuw*, ed. K. de Gheldere (Brugge: 1896) 67, 83, 84: 'Maer, omme dat menich niet ne weet, / Die tlatijn niet en versteet, / Wat hi bidt en wat hi doet, / Anders dan zine menighe es goet, / So hebbict, bider Gods jonste, / In Dietsche gemaect, zo ic best conste'. I am grateful to Father Kurt Priem, archivist, het Grootseminarie ter Brugge boekery, for assistance resolving confusion over this manuscript. The MS number is incorrectly given as "72/97" and the folio number of the poem is inaccurately cited as "70 recto" in De Gheldere K., "'Van Ons Heren Wonden' Naar een Brugsch Handschrift" in *Overgedr ukt Uit het Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche Taal-en-Letterkunde, Deel XIII*, 2–7. On other texts of this poem, see Moltzer's redaction of the manuscripts in the libraries of the Rijksuniversiteit te Utrecht and at Groningen: Moltzer H.E., "Van Ons Heren Wonden," *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche Taal-en-Letterkunde* 2, 29 (1888) 1–6. (GBS MS incorrectly numbered "72/97" instead of 72–175). Gheldere dates the book as late fifteenth-century. Smeyers and Cardon date it 1410–1420, noting similarities between its miniatures and an illustration (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Jesus College 32, folio 15) by the Meester van de Beaufortheligen in Brugge: Smeyers M.–Cardon B., "Vier Eeuwen Vlaamse Miniatuurkunst in Handschriften uit het Grootseminarie te Brugge", in *De Duinenabdij en het Grootseminarie te Brugge* (Tielt–Weesp: 1984) 150, 151, 156; notes 34 and 38; fig. 69. Oosterman argues the book was made in Brugge 1400–1415: Oosterman J.B., *De gratie van het gebed: Middelnederlandse gebeden: overlevering en functie met bijzondere aandacht voor productie en receptie in Brugge (1380–1450)*, Deel 2: Repertorium (Amsterdam: 1995) 93, 329, no. 17. I agree that the illuminations resemble several others made in Brugge in the

Maerlant's writings because he integrated a poem attributed to him, 'Ons Heren Wonden' ('Our Lord's Wounds'), into the book.<sup>24</sup> Use of the phrase *zo ic best conste* (as best as I could) in the prologue adheres to the usage traced above, which stemmed from Maerlant's coinage of *so ic best mach* and extended to van Ruusbroec's wording *als best cont* as well as to the phrase *na mijn vermoeden* employed in *Ons Heren Passie*. I contend that van Eyck acquired his motto directly from this tradition.

*Als ich can* is much closer linguistically to expressions like *zo ic best conste*, which had cultural currency in the Netherlands during the fifteenth century, than it is to the antique platitude *ut potui, non sicut volui*. Most of the inscriptions on van Eyck's pictures are written in Latin. This supports references to his erudition, such as Bartholomeo Fazio's statement that 'he was not unlettered' ('*litterarum non-nihil doctus*').<sup>25</sup> Yet there is no record that he ever inscribed his motto in Latin. The motto is one of two known examples of the artist's use of Dutch in inscriptions. Both anomalies invoke the poetic tradition. Inscribed around his portrait of silversmith Jan de Leeuw is a four-line Dutch verse, which Dhanens has suggested resulted from 'a cheerful and cordial atmosphere between artist and poet, a tradition that always prevailed in Flemish guilds'.<sup>26</sup> Although de Leeuw may have supplied the poem, inscriptions of *Als ich can* on other works, including the artist's self-portrait, indicate that this saying was the painter's own device and was chosen by him personally. The atypical vernacular

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period 1400–1425. The translation above was kindly provided by Dr. Noël Geirnaert, Hoofdarchivaris, Stadsarchief Brugge.

<sup>24</sup> GSB MS. 72–175, folios 77<sup>r</sup>–80<sup>r</sup>. Edition: *Dietsce Rime*, 86–90.

<sup>25</sup> The *Ghent Altarpiece*, *Tymotheos*, *Man in a Red Turban* (Self Portrait), the *Arnolfini Double Portrait*, the *Virgin with Canon Van der Paele*, *Dresden Triptych*, *Saint Barbara*, the *Virgin with Chancellor Nicolas Rolin*, *Virgin and Child at the Fountain*, *Margaret van Eyck*, the *Annunciation Diptych*, the *Virgin in the Church* (frame lost), and the *Annunciation* at the National Gallery, Washington, D.C. bear Latin inscriptions, as do copies of van Eyck's lost *Holy Face* of 1438 and 1440. Fazio wrote van Eyck was thought 'to have discovered many things about the properties of colours recorded by the ancients and learned by him from reading of Pliny and other authors'. Michael Baxandall, "Bartholomaeus Facius on Painting: A Fifteenth-Century Manuscript of the *De Viris Illustribus*", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 27 (1964) 90–107; quotation at 102–103.

<sup>26</sup> Dhanens, *Hubert and Jan van Eyck* 238. The frame of *Jan de Leeuw*, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna is inscribed: 'I'an de [a lion] op sant opselen dach dat claeer eerst met oghen sach. 1401. Gheconterfeit nu hees mi Jan Van Eyck wel bliict wanneert bega(n). 1436'.

form of van Eyck's motto categorically attests its origin in the Dutch poetic tradition.

Dattie scripturen begripen sel: *Intersections Between van Eyck's Career and Dutch Literary Culture*

Historical factors indicate that, throughout his career, van Eyck lived and worked in cultural atmospheres where Maerlant's literary reputation and writings were well known. The poet's works were highly influential in the Netherlands and received close attention at The Hague court, where the painter was employed by John of Bavaria from 1422 until the ruler's death in 1424.<sup>27</sup> Examination of developments within this cultural nexus brings new evidence to bear on the origin, meaning, and artistic implications of the painter's motto. During the first half of the fourteenth century, the French language and literary style prevailed among the ruling classes in Holland. The region's most prominent locus of literary activity was then in Schoonhoven, at the court of John of Blois, a descendant of the Hainaut line.<sup>28</sup> In the second half of the century, the concentration of literary activity shifted to The Hague, after the abdication in 1358 of Count William V of Holland to his brother, Albert, Duke of Bavaria.<sup>29</sup> Duke Albert promoted a fusion of Bavarian and Dutch dialects at court, which provided a favorable context for the reception and production of Dutch literature at The Hague.<sup>30</sup>

Frits van Oostrom has argued persuasively that the court library contained several of Maerlant's works: "There is little doubt but that a

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>28</sup> Van Oostrom, *Court and Culture* 9–10.

<sup>29</sup> Bavarian counts ruled Holland until its annexation by Burgundy in 1433. Ibid. 1–10.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 1–10. Van Eyck's spelling of *ich* [I] conforms to contemporary German orthography instead of Dutch (which would have been *ic*). For this reason Jochen Becker describes van Eyck's motto as Dutch 'tinged with Limburg dialect', alluding to the painter's family's home province: Becker J., "Reviewed work(s): Korrespondenz 1910–1936 by Erwin Panofsky; Dieter Wuttke" *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 30, 1/2 (2003) 124–129 (quotation at 124). Also see Scheller, "Als ich can" 135–139. On the blending of German and Dutch dialects in Netherlandish poetry at The Hague, see de Haan C., *Dichten in stijl: Duitse kleuring in Middelnederlandse teksten*, Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur in de middeleeuwen XX, eds. F.P. van Oostrom and W. van Anrooij (Amsterdam: 1999) *passim*.

copy of Maerlant's own *Spiegel historiael* would have been found at the Hague court, for that work, commissioned in about 1258 by Floris V, the then count of Holland, had been for over a hundred years and still was the only world history written in Middle Dutch'.<sup>31</sup> On the basis of writings originating at the Hague court, van Oostrom has asserted that authors employed there relied heavily upon Maerlant's texts. Of Bavaria Herald, an anonymous writer engaged at the court between 1386 and 1414, van Oostrom has stated: 'He must have woken up with Maerlant's writings and have gone to sleep with them... *Der naturen bloeme, Rijmbijbel, Alexanders geesten*... [He] had to know Maerlant's works inside out'.<sup>32</sup>

It would also seem that principles formulated by Maerlant and codified by Boendale informed critical thinking among writers at The Hague. In the late fourteenth century, Willem van Hildegarsberch, a poet and performer employed by Albert of Bavaria, responded to the requirements for poets specified in *Der leken spiegel* in a poem titled 'Van ghilden'. He indicates his compliance with the categories of *waer-echteheide* and *eersam van levene*, stating, 'The noble lords should be told the truth about what is useful and what is harmful to the soul' ('Men soud den heren seggen twaer Wat oirbair is of zielen vaer').<sup>33</sup> Lacking education, van Hildegarsberch fell short of the third requirement, *grammarijn*. He laments disadvantages of uneducated poets:

This I have learned from [Boendale's *The Layman's*] *Mirror*... He who can explain the meaning of the scriptures (the written text), has insight into the essence of writing. But he who is unable to consult the written sources and who wishes to write nonetheless, just like I have often done, he is often beset by fear, because he is afraid that he will be misinterpreting the written text.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Van Oostrom, *Court and Culture* 137. 'Where else would Bavaria Herald... have obtained the copious writings of Jacob van Maerlant, which, according to his chronicles, he had constantly within reach?' (ibid., 28).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 137-158.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>34</sup> Bisschop W. – Verwijs E., *Gedichten van Willem van Hildegarsberch* ('s-Gravenhage: 1870) LXI 6-19. 'Des heb ic Spiegel horen lyen, / ...Can hi der scrifturen woort / Nader waerheit wel versinnen, / Soe mach hi aert van dicten kinnen; / Mar wye / die scriften niet en can, / Ende ymmer dichten wil nochtan, / Als ic / dickent hebbe ghedaen, / Die is mit anxten zeer bevaen; / Want hi ducht voer die scrifture, / Maect hijs niet goet ende pure, / Dattie scrifture begripen sel'. Van Hildegarsberch

Another court poet, Dirk Potter (fl. after 1410), touts his Latin education at the beginning of *Der minnen loep* (*The Course of Love*): 'My skills I do not greatly praise; yet praiseworthy I deem the ability to read and write and a fair grasp of Latin; for these I went to school'.<sup>35</sup>

In its content and critical orientation, literature produced at The Hague in the decades immediately preceding van Eyck's tenure there affirms that the court's culture was steeped in Maerlant's texts, several of which the court library probably possessed. These circumstances strongly suggest that, while serving the Count of Holland, the painter was exposed to ideas generated by Maerlant's writings and had direct access to his texts. Even if the poet's lingering influence at The Hague had escaped van Eyck's notice, it is doubtful that his legendary reputation would have remained unknown to the painter after 1425, when he became *valet de chambre*, diplomat, and court painter to Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy. This engagement led van Eyck in 1430 to establish a workshop in Brugge, where he lived and worked until his death in 1441.<sup>36</sup> Maerlant was educated at Brugge's collegiate church of St. Donatian and later lived in the nearby port town, Damme.<sup>37</sup> The poet's writings and professional renown left a profound impression on the cultural imagination of these West Flemish towns.<sup>38</sup> Given van Eyck's prominent position as a courtier-painter whose learning seems to have shaped his professional reputation, it is likely that he was aware of the poet's writings and the critical ideas they espoused.

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presumably referred to Boendale's *Der leken spiegel*. Cd-Rom Middelnederlands. Translation: Lie, "What is Truth" 56–57.

<sup>35</sup> Potter D., *Der minnen loep*, Book I, verses 36–40. Edition: *Der minnen loep door Dirck Potter*, ed. P. Leendertz, Wz., 2 dln. (Leiden: 1845–1846): 'Mijn konst en prisic niet een eey: / Doch donct my prisens weerdich wesen, / Datmen kan scriven ende lesen / Ende te maten Latijn verstaen. / Daer om heb ic ter scole ghegaen'. CD-Rom Middelnederlands. Translation: Van Oostrom, *Court and Culture* 30.

<sup>36</sup> On May 19, 1425 van Eyck was appointed painter and *valet de chambre* to Duke Philip the Good of Burgundy. By August 2 of that year he moved to Lille, where he primarily resided until moving to Brugge in 1429, where he bought a house in 1431 or 1432 and resided until his death in 1441. *Northern Renaissance Art, 1400–1600: Sources and Documents*, 3–4; Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, Vol. I, 178.

<sup>37</sup> Van Oostrom, *Maerlants Wereld*, 7–16.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 377–458.

*A Dutch Motto Written With Greek Letters*

If van Eyck's use of Dutch points directly to vernacular sources, instead of to the classical tradition emulated by medieval copyists, what, then, is to be inferred from the Greek letters (i.e., 'Λ' *Labda*, 'Σ' *Sigma*, 'Η' *Eta*, and 'Χ' *Chi*) in his motto's inscriptions?<sup>39</sup> One possibility is that the Greek letters demonstrated the artist's superior command of *grammarijn*, as they display an impressive familiarity with a classical language that was studied far less commonly in the region than Latin.<sup>40</sup> It is also possible that the painter reformulated the literary category of *waerechteheide* to encompass the authentication of formal conventions. His Greek inscriptions attest that van Eyck had firsthand knowledge of a select class of authoritative artistic models: Byzantine icons recorded in inventories of Philip the Good's possessions.<sup>41</sup> In his analysis of the painter's motto, Scheller identified Jesus Christ's Greek monogram, ΙΧ (*Iota* and *Chi*), with the painter's unusual spelling of the Dutch word *ic* using a Latin I (or Greek *Iota*), a X, (*Chi*), and an H (*Eta*).<sup>42</sup> Subsequently, Dirk De Vos demonstrated that *Als ich can* contains an anagram of van Eyck's name.<sup>43</sup> Rearranged, the Latin letters I-A-N spell JAN and the Greek letters H-Σ-X (*Eta*, *Sigma*, and *Chi*) approximate EYCK.<sup>44</sup> Encoding his own name along with Christ's

<sup>39</sup> TYM. ΩΘΕΟC is inscribed on Van Eyck's *Tymotheos*, 1432, National Gallery, London. Greek letters also appear on *Portrait of Jan de Leeuw*. De Vos, "Nogmaals ALS ICH CAN" 1–2. Also see Smeyers M., "Jan van Eyck, archaeologist? Reflections on Eyckian epigraphy", in *Archaeological and Historical Aspects of West-European Societies. Album Amicorum André Van Doorselaer. Acta Archaeologica Lovanensia Monographiae* 8, ed. M. Lodewijckx (Leuven: 1996) 403–414. Access to official court documents may have exposed the painter to the scribal convention of alternating Latin and Greek letters to encode names at the end of transcribed texts. Yet it is doubtful that one who so directly laid claim to his pictorial inventions would have sought to identify himself with copyists. On van Eyck's identification of himself as an inventor, see Koerner, *The Moment of Self Portraiture* 3–138.

<sup>40</sup> Verdam J., *Uit de Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Taal*, 4th edition (Zutphen: 1923) 237–242. A rare exception was Maerlant, who indicated he had access to Greek texts: van Oostrom, *Maerlant's Wereld* 54. "Textus grecismi in pergameno" written in the 1481 Testament van Jan Bayart, *Inventaris van zijn sterfhuys, Rekening van de Testamentuitvoerders* also indicates that Greek texts were in Flanders: Derolez A., *Corpus Catalogorum Belgii*, 135, nr. 83 (110).

<sup>41</sup> Dhanens, *Hubert and Jan van Eyck* 180.

<sup>42</sup> Scheller, "Als ich can" 135–139.

<sup>43</sup> Vos, "Nogmaals ALS ICH CAN" 1–4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, further observes that 'the text on the cross in the main scene of the *Ghent Altarpiece* is very like the tripartite form of Jan's motto', and comments, 'This makes it seem very likely that the motto also has an, as yet undeciphered, religious content'.



Greek monogram, the artist alluded to his relationship with Byzantine icons, which bore similar monogram inscriptions.<sup>45</sup>

Byzantine icons may have informed van Eyck's selective use of his device on particular types of pictures. His extant and documented works demonstrate that he affixed the motto exclusively to paintings of Christ, the Madonna, his wife Margaret, and himself.<sup>46</sup> Previous research indicates that hieratic poses of Mary and the Christ child and bust-length portrait formats used by van Eyck and other Netherlandish artists derived, at least in part, from Byzantine models.<sup>47</sup> The authority attached to Byzantine icons issued not only from their Eastern origins, but also from the pedigrees of the images they contained, as some of them replicated the appearance of highly venerated relics known as *acheiropoietai*. This category of pictures includes the Veil of Veronica, the Mandylion of Edessa, and a painting of the Virgin, all of which were believed to have been miraculously rendered.<sup>48</sup> Because Christ

<sup>45</sup> I have also hypothesized that the double anagram *IAN HEX / IXH* demonstrates the painter's intention to fuse his artistic identity with that of Christ. I have presented evidence that, in his works, the painter identified Christ as the exemplary artist: Smith J.L., "Als Ich Can: Poetic Origins of Jan van Eyck's Device Elucidate Artistic Identity in *The Madonna with Canon Van der Paele*", College Art Association, Annual Conference, Los Angeles, CA, 2009; and Smith J.L., "So moeti den scilt draghen; Dien God veruwede met roder greine: Jan van Eyck's Critical Principles of Oil Painting and Their Middle Dutch Antecedents", PhD diss., The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, 2008.

<sup>46</sup> See note 3 above for the list of paintings inscribed with van Eyck's motto.

<sup>47</sup> Ringbom S., *Icon to Narrative. The Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting* (Abo: 1965) 42–43, 48, 60–61, 68, 143; Belting H., *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function in Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. Mark Bertusis–Raymond Meyer (New Rochelle: 1990) chapters I, III and IV. Also see Maryan Ainsworth's catalogue entry in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)*, ed. H. Evans, exh. cat., New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, (New Haven–London: 2004), cat. no. 353, 588–593.

<sup>48</sup> Included in this category of relics is the legendary painting of Christ begun by the Evangelist Luke and finished by an angel. See Kessler H.L.–Zacharias J., *Rome 1300: On the path of the pilgrim* (New Haven–London: 2000) 60–63, 90–93, fig. 55. An icon is itemized in Liège cathedral as *Primo imago Beatae Mariae Virginis depicta a Beato Luca Evangelista* ('First [is an] image of the Blessed Virgin Mary painted by the Blessed Evangelist Luke'). Philippe J., *La Cathédrale Saint-Lambert de Liège: Gloire de l'Occident et de l'art mosan* (Liège: 1979) 252. On the Veronica, see Kessler H.L., *Old Saint Peter's and Church Decoration in Medieval Italy* (Spoleto: 2002) 11–12. Also see Kessler H., *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia: 2000) 15–17, 70–76. *The Holy Face of Laon* was a famous icon painting of the Mandylion of Edessa located during the late Middle Ages in the Cistercian convent of Manteuil-en-Thiérache, near the border of France and the Netherlands. On the Mandylion of Edessa as the model for *The Holy Face of Laon*, see *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, cat. no. 95, 174–175. The relic may have had an audience and

was said to have created images of his face in the Veil of Veronica and the Mandylion of Edessa, these divine self-portraits were construed as authoritative models for the use of bust formats in oil painting. Similarly, a portrait of the Virgin that was believed to have been painted by St. Luke with the assistance of an angel inspired compositions for pictures of the Virgin and Christ child. Van Eyck may have sought to validate his use of such formats by demonstrating his knowledge of authentic prototypes. By inscribing Greek letters copied from Byzantine icons on his own paintings of the Virgin, Christ, and on his bust-length portraits of himself and his wife, he established for these works a pictorial lineage that issued from sacred images of Christ and Mary.<sup>49</sup>

Joining his motto with certain pictures, van Eyck imparted to them the symbolic status of a personal emblem. Erwin Panofsky has characterized *Als ich can* as a bid 'to imitate the nobles in adopting a personal motto'.<sup>50</sup> However, van Eyck's embrace of this mode of expression has a significance beyond social status. His subscription to the idiom suggests that functions ascribed to emblems in heraldry attend the images with which he conjoined his motto. Nobles' mottoes were typically employed in concert with coats-of-arms or other individualized

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following around Brugge. A fifteenth-century chronicler of the Dunes Abbey recorded in "Supplementum Cronice Abbatum de Dunis" that an image on cloth of the face of our Lord Jesus Christ was brought to the abbey for the inauguration of the institution on October 3, 1262. Ainsworth identifies this icon with *The Holy Face of Laon*: *ibid.* cat. no. 333, 560–561. Dhanens observes that a neckless Holy Face is depicted on a singing angel's vestments in the *Ghent Altarpiece*: see Dhanens, *Hubert and Jan van Eyck* 110, fig. 70. This image indicates that van Eyck was familiar with the Laon relic. On representations of the Holy Face and devotion, see Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. E. Jephcott (Chicago: 1994) *passim*; *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation: papers from a colloquium held at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome and the Villa Spellman, Florence, 1996*, eds. H.L. Kessler and G. Wolf (Bologna: 1998) *passim*; Rothstein B.L., *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting*. Studies in Netherlandish Visual Culture (New York: 2005) 61–90; and Pentcheva, B.V., "The Performative Icon", *The Art Bulletin* 88, 4 (December 2006) 631–655.

<sup>49</sup> Ainsworth notes that prayer beads were a traditional gift from a bridegroom to his bride in the Netherlands during the fifteenth century and has argued that the beads van Eyck depicted in the Christ child's hand in *The Virgin and Child at the Fountain* evoke the identification of Mary and Christ as Bride and Bridegroom. See *Byzantium: Faith and Power* 590. I have argued that parallels between pictures of Christ and Mary and portraits of Jan van Eyck and his wife Margaret may reflect conceptions of Christ and Mary as the Bride and Bridegroom in Netherlandish devotion. Smith, "So moeti den scilt draghen" chapter 5.

<sup>50</sup> Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, Vol. I, 179.



emblems.<sup>51</sup> Van Eyck's service at the Burgundian court exposed him to this system of identity signification.<sup>52</sup> The dukes of Burgundy crafted ducal identity by deploying a number of such devices. Philip the Bold coupled the emblem of an oak leaf, signifying constancy, with the French saying *Y ME TARDE* (I am waiting), which may have alluded to his ambition of becoming coregent of France. His son, John the Fearless, used Philip's emblem until he married Margaret of Bavaria in 1385. He then adopted a hops branch, signifying fidelity, conjoined with the German motto: *ICH HALTZ MICH* (I am silent).<sup>53</sup> Around 1390, he indicated his defiance of French rivals through German and Flemish alliances by adding a German helmet and translating his motto into Flemish: *ICH SWIGHE*. In 1406, after reigning as duke for two years, he replaced the helmet with a level plane, a symbol of good government.<sup>54</sup> He later signified industry with a beehive, and reintroduced the theme of constancy with his paternal oak leaf. Laurent Hablot has asserted that, with John the Fearless, the use of emblems 'took on a new dimension', observing, 'Without losing any of their initial functions and in order to set apart the prince and his followers, his heraldic devices assumed a more precise message and became a veritable tool of political propaganda, whose import continued to grow for the dukes of Burgundy'.<sup>55</sup>

Mottoes and emblems served as creative expressions of the duke's personal distinction while signaling political defiance of French power and proclaiming Burgundian independence.<sup>56</sup> The symbolic language

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<sup>51</sup> Hablot L., "The Use of Emblems by Philip the Bold and John the Fearless", in *Art from the Court of Burgundy: The Patronage of Philip the Bold and John the Fearless 1364–1419*, exh. cat., Musée des Beaux-Arts of Dijon May 28–September 15, 2004; The Cleveland Museum of Art October 24, 2004–January 9, 2005 (Paris: 2004) 81–83.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>53</sup> The hops plant grows in a twining vine. Ibid., 83.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Historical events demonstrate that political strategies of the House of Burgundy during the fifteenth century contained an anti-French element. Flanders became part of the earldom of Burgundy with the marriage of the French Duke Philip the Bold to Flemish Countess Margaret de Male in 1369. The dukes of Burgundy had close familial connections with the French monarchs, and at times during the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries participated in governing Paris. However, their relationship with the French crown deteriorated precipitously after Philip the Bold's death in 1404. His son, John the Fearless, was a fierce rival of Louis d'Orléans, who strove to eliminate the Burgundian influence from the French royal government. In 1407, John had Louis assassinated in Paris. Civil war ensued, during which, in 1418, John's troops massacred French forces in Paris, including the Count of Armagnac. The next year,

of such devices was adaptable to changing circumstances and ambitions. John the Fearless adjusted his motto's political import through the conjunction of fluid linguistic permeations with selected images. In a similar manner, van Eyck implemented messages of personal distinction and professional independence from French painting traditions, by manipulating the wording of his motto, its language and orthography, and varying the images to which he attached it. As the duke's device expressed his political strategy in statecraft, van Eyck's device expressed his critical strategy in art.

### *Critical Implications of Van Eyck's Motto*

Because van Eyck modeled his personal device after a literary convention used in prologues, it is possible that the motto served as a condensed written prologue to his works, wherein he vowed that his paintings were grounded upon authoritative sources, which he understood and represented clearly, without extraneous ornamentation. Because *Als ich can* is cognate to expressions like *so ic best mach*, the meanings codified in it diverge substantively from those attached to *ut potui, non sicut volui*. In contrast to the modesty feigned in the Latin formula, the Dutch device proclaims a sincere pledge that its author has set forth his best effort. Rather than simply coopting the literary paradigm that had been shaped by Maerlant and disseminated by Boendale, van Eyck redefined its critical principles in his own artistic terms.

The stylistic impact of these principles is evident when comparing van Eyck's art with the tradition of panel painting that emanated from France in the fourteenth century and prevailed in Northern Europe at the outset of the fifteenth century. An example of the French mode, known now as the International style, is *Crucifixion with Saints* (Fig. 4), an anonymous Netherlandish triptych from ca. 1420 that features inscribed banderoles unfurled against a patterned gold ground. Van

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followers of the French dauphin, Charles, avenged the Armagnac deaths by assassinating John the Fearless. The slain Duke of Burgundy's son, Philip the Good (van Eyck's patron), allied himself with the king of England against the French crown. Though he signed the Treaty of Arras with King Charles VII of France in 1435, the reconciliation was superficial. Tensions continued to grow throughout their reigns, and their sons, Charles the Bold of Burgundy and Louis XI of France, became bitter military adversaries. See Schnerb B., "The Dukes of Burgundy and the Burgundian Principalities (1361–1419)", in *Art from the Court of Burgundy* 27–33.

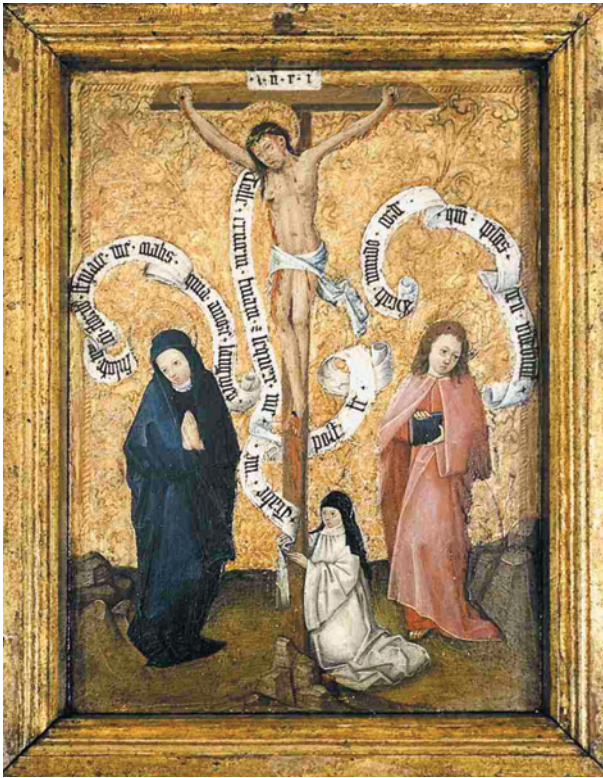


Fig. 4. Anonymous (Netherlands) *Crucifixion with Saints*, center panel of triptych (ca. 1420). Tempera and oil on wood, 35.5 × 16 cm. Germany, Marks Thomeé Sammlung. Image © Marks Thomeé Sammlung

Eyck relied less on decorative flourishes in his treatment of comparable elements in the *Crucifixion* (Fig. 5). His inscriptions conform to a linear format on the frame's edges, instead of appearing on expansive scrolls within the scene. The cloud-filled blue sky contrasts with the elaborate gold pattern that forms the earlier work's background.

Formal traits of van Eyck's oil technique may also be compared to characteristics of French Gothic manuscript painting.<sup>57</sup> Manuscript illumination combined patterned gold backgrounds and flowing banderoles with complexly decorated borders. This tradition prevailed

<sup>57</sup> Van Buren A.H., Marrow J.H. – Pettenati S., *Heures de Turin-Milan: Inv. No. 47*, Museo Civico d'Arte Antica, Torino, 2 vols. (Lucerne: 1994; commentary volume 1996) *passim*.



Fig. 5. Jan van Eyck (and workshop assistant). *Crucifixion* (ca. 1430). Oil on canvas, transferred from wood, 56.5 × 19.7 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY





Fig. 6. Anonymous (Flanders) *Crucifixion* in a missal from a church in Brugge (15th century). Parchment, 31.1 × 22.5 cm. Brugge: Openbare Bibliotheek Brugge MS. 314, fol. 87v. Image © Openbare Bibliotheek Brugge

in Flanders throughout the fifteenth century, as the crucifixion (Fig. 6) painted in a missal from a church in Brugge demonstrates.<sup>58</sup> Passages of van Eyck's *Crucifixion* comprise intricate patterns and elegant designs that are representative of specific materials, such as the embroidered purse worn by a rider and his horse's metal-studded leather breast-piece (Fig. 7). In distinction to the floral border and the elaborate patterned and gilt background in the missal, van Eyck rendered repetitive decorative elements as descriptive integral qualities of representational objects. Unlike many manuscript painters, who often filled pictorial

<sup>58</sup> Openbare Bibliotheek Brugge MS. 314 folio 87v. Poorter A.de, *Catalogue des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Publique de la Ville de Bruges* 351–352.



Fig. 7. Jan van Eyck (and workshop assistant). *Crucifixion*, detail (ca. 1430). Oil on canvas, transferred from wood. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY

space with flat pattern that operates independently of discrete forms of depicted objects, van Eyck confined patterns on his illusionistic surfaces strictly within contours of the objective forms they adorned.

Van Eyck's images participate in the category of *waerechteheide*, as they demonstrate he was true to his visual experience, which, as courtier, would have included firsthand exposure to various fabrics and armorial decorations during court festivities and public processions. Though he depicted a profusion of shapes and patterns in the crucifixion scene, the artist exercised formal restraint in painting the imagery.<sup>59</sup> Van Eyck's avoidance of decorative patterns extraneous

<sup>59</sup> In the late fifteenth century the Italian humanist Cristoforo Landino described Masaccio's art as 'pure and unadorned'. See Wohl H., "Puro senza ornato: Masaccio, Cristoforo Landino and Leonardo da Vinci", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld*

to the forms within his compositions adheres to the principle of *eersam van leve* and recalls van Ruusbroec's dictum of brevity and clarity in speech. The painter's motto underscores the stylistic agreement between his imagery and the poems of Maerlant and other Dutch writers who guarded against indulgence in unnecessary literary ornaments.

Van Eyck exploited the full representational potential of his oil medium to imbue the painted inscriptions of *Als ich can* with an unprecedented physicality in illusionistic depictions of letters engraved in gold or carved in stone.<sup>60</sup> Nonverbal qualities he imparted to renderings of his motto in oils signal that the precepts he formulated for his art were distinct from those of the poetic tradition that had initially fostered them. In addition to the contents of authoritative texts (including, but not limited to, the Bible), the artist deployed his visual experience as valid source material for his works.<sup>61</sup> The observation of objective forms not only enabled the painter to explicate and restructure textual information in his work, but also allowed him to introduce extra-textual subjects. With this fundamental adjustment, he expanded the criterion of *waerechteheide* to include visual truthfulness in the form of descriptive representational imaging.<sup>62</sup>

Early characterizations of oil paintings as *spieghele* (mirrors) indicate that viewers recognized strong correspondences between artists' carefully articulated imagery and the world they perceived around them.<sup>63</sup>

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*Institutes* 56 (1993) 256–260. I am grateful to my editors for kindly bringing this source to my attention.

<sup>60</sup> On his self-portrait, letters appear incised in gold, as on the Dresden *Triptych*. On frames of *Margaret van Eyck* and *The Virgin of the Fountain*, letters appear carved in marble. His signature in the *Arnolfini Double Portrait* appears as graffiti, and inscriptions in *Tymotheos* appear incised in stone.

<sup>61</sup> On the significance of visual experience in van Eyck's art, see Melion W.S., *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon. Karel van Mander's Schilder-Boeck* (Chicago-London: 1991) 60–91.

<sup>62</sup> Though I think the mimetic capacity of van Eyck's oil technique was unprecedented, I do not mean to imply that van Eyck lacked stylistic precursors in representational painting, including the Limbourg family, the Maelwael family, the Boucicaut Master, and Melchior Broederlam, among others. See Smeyers M. – Cardon B. – Vertongen S. – Smeyers K. – van Dooren R., *Naer Natueren Ghelike. Vlaamse Miniaturen Voor Van Eyck (ca. 1350–ca. 1420)* (Leuven: 1993) *passim*; *Pre-Eyckian panel painting in the Low Countries*, 2 Volumes, ed. C. Stroo (Brussels: 2009) *passim*.

<sup>63</sup> In 1565 the Ghent painter and poet Lucas de Heere wrote that van Eyck's paintings were mirrors, not painted panels, 'Tsijn spieghele, en gheen gheschilderde taferelen'. Heere L.de, *Den Hof en Boomgaerd der Poësie*, ed. W. Waterschoot (Zwolle: 1969) 30, line 24.

Because van Eyck's paintings demonstrated a precise way to represent a variety of visible things, they reinforced the careful visual examination of actual objects. Because his approach to picture making showed the potential for observation as a tool for learning about the physical world, his art suggested a new role for artists as mediators in the acquisition of knowledge about natural phenomena.<sup>64</sup> His paintings may also have established a basis for critical categories pertaining to description, differentiation, and understanding in written art theory.

In the first critical history of Netherlandish art, published in 1604, Karel van Mander praised Pieter Bruegel the Elder's skill as a landscape painter and posited that, in his desire to imitate, the artist pictured things which had not been described before.<sup>65</sup> This desire may have been rooted in van Eyck's demonstrations of the ability to convert visual experience of unfamiliar objects into understandable pictures. Van Mander characterized the *Ghent Altarpiece* as the *summa* of the art of oil painting, in which Jan and his brother Hubert van Eyck expounded both the function of *patientie* (patience), in the meticulous description of familiar things, such as horses and liturgical books, as well as the agency of *verstant* (understanding), in the precise description of unusual things, such as rare stones and exotic flora.<sup>66</sup> Using skills van Mander later identified as *scerpicheyt* (sharpness) and *netticheyt* (neatness), Jan and Hubert in the polyptych discriminated between many species of plants, articulated distinctive features for scores of faces, and described a wide variety of surfaces and textures. Such discriminations resulted in visual distinctions that Van Mander characterized as *verscheydenheyt* (differentiation). In his chapter on composition, the writer calls upon painters 'to build into history [painting] a profusion of things' ('in d'History een overfloet te bouwen') and asserted 'that

<sup>64</sup> I agree with Pamela Smith, who posits that 'the history of naturalistic representation and the rise of modern science are interconnected'. She asserts that in his works van Eyck claimed to imitate and know nature, thereby pioneering a form of 'artisanal epistemology' that informed natural philosophy in later centuries. Smith, *The Body of the Artisan* 1–55 (quotations at 23, 25).

<sup>65</sup> In 'Van het Landschap. Het achtste Capittel' van Mander writes: 'Bequamer t'uytbeelden soo vreemde dinghen, Hoe comt ons lust tot naevolgh oock niet dringhen?': Karel van Mander, *Het schilder-boeck, waerin voor eerst de leerlustighe leught den grondt der edel vry schilderconst in verscheyden deelen wort voorghedraeghen*. Reprint of the first edition from Haarlem, P. v. Westusch, 1604 (Utrecht: 1969) folio 35<sup>r</sup>, 12. On van Mander's distinction between variety and copiousness, see Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon* 179, 303, note 19.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 55, 139.



everything embraced and comprehended by our art must be gathered into history [painting]' ('Dat in d'Historie alles wordt ghebracht, was onse Const omhelsen oft begrijpen can').<sup>67</sup>

Van Mander's emphasis on the usefulness of observation in organizing a comprehensive pictorial history is consistent with the philosophy of collecting formulated by the scholar and memory theorist Samuel van Quiccheberg (b. Antwerp 1529, d. Munich 1567). In the earliest printed museological tract, written for Duke Albert V of Bavaria, van Quiccheberg extensively categorizes the contents of an ideal princely collection.<sup>68</sup> The author outlines the organization of various types of artwork, plants, animals and minerals, which he characterizes as collectively forming an encyclopedic theater of objects representing the whole universe.<sup>69</sup> Within this framework, he emphasizes the usefulness of prints and paintings representing a great variety of subjects as tools for the acquisition of universal knowledge.<sup>70</sup> Van Quiccheberg's

<sup>67</sup> Mander K. van, *Het schilder-boeck*, folio 17<sup>r</sup>, 25b. Translation: Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon* 198, note 22 (Additions in brackets were made by the author.)

<sup>68</sup> Quiccheberg, Samuel van, *Inscriptiones vel tituli theatri amplissimi* (Munich: Monachii Berg, 1565) *passim*.

<sup>69</sup> Hajós E.M., "The Concept of an Engravings Collection in the Year 1565: Quiccheberg, *Inscriptiones vel tituli theatri amplissimi*", *The Art Bulletin* 40 (1958) 151–156.

<sup>70</sup> On the function of pictures in such collections, see Pomian K., *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500–1800*, trans. E. Wiles-Portier (Cambridge: 1990) 49–55. It is notable that paintings by van Eyck were featured in some princely collections. A workshop copy of van Eyck's *The Virgin and Child at the Fountain* was in the collection of Margaret of Austria in Mechelen. *Byzantium: Faith and Power* 589–590. Mechelen palace inventories from 1516 and 1523, or 1524, list a painting that has been identified as van Eyck's *Arnolfini Double Portrait*. References to the painting are also made in later inventories of the possessions of Margaret's niece, Mary of Hungary, and in the collection of King Philip II of Spain. See Campbell, *The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Schools* 174–211. The lost cover of the Arnolfini painting, described in early textual documents, was copied by an anonymous fifteenth-century artist and was depicted in the painting *The Archduke Albert and his consort Isabella, accompanied by P.P. Rubens, visiting the constabler of Cornelis van der Geest in 1615* by Willem van Haecht in 1621. On the fifteenth-century copy, which belongs to the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, MA, see *The Age of Van Eyck. The Mediterranean World and Early Netherlandish Painting 1430–1530*, exh. cat., Brugge, Groeningemuseum, 15 March–20 June 2002 (Ghent–Amsterdam: 2002) cat. No. 36, p. 239. On van Haecht's *Kunstkammer* scene, which is now at the Rubens House in Antwerp, see Dhanens, *Hubert and Jan van Eyck* 206–211, figs. 136 and 138 (detail). Also see Campbell, as above; Briels J., "Amator Pictoriae Artis: De Antwerpse kunstverzamelaar Peeter Stevens (1590–1668) en zijn Constkamer", *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (1980) 137–266 (especially 175–180); *The Age of Van Eyck*, cat. no. 36, 239; and Held J., "Artis Pictoriae Amator, An

diverse pictorial typology underscores his premise that the collector could learn by seeing pictures of natural specimens.

Simultaneous with the cultivation of visual inquiry in collectors' cabinets, naturalists began to employ illustration as a valuable tool for scientific classification. Conrad Gesner adopted an encyclopedic approach to the study of natural history in *De rerum fossilium, lapidum et gemmarum maximè, figuris & similitudinibus liber: non solum medicis, sed omnibus rerum naturae ac philologiae studiosis, vtilis & iucundus futurus*. (On Fossil Objects: A Book on fossil Objects, chiefly Stones and Gems, their Shapes and Appearances). This text, published in Zurich in 1565, is often cited as marking the emergence of paleontology.<sup>71</sup> Gesner achieved a methodological breakthrough in his systematic use of illustrations. Moving beyond the traditional philological approach of reviewing verbal descriptions in earlier texts, including writings from antiquity, the author presents printed representations based on his visual experience of specimens. Gesner explains that he included as many illustrations in the book as possible 'so that students may more easily recognise objects that cannot be very clearly described in words'.<sup>72</sup> Gesner's approach differed greatly from the schematic use of pictures observed in late medieval natural digests.<sup>73</sup> Illustrations for Maerlant's *Der naturen bloeme* appear to be informed primarily by descriptions in the text, which often derived from ancient writers, such as Pliny the Elder and Aristotle.<sup>74</sup> A miniature (Fig. 8) accompanying the entry for *cervus marinus* (seal) in a manuscript of *Der naturen bloeme*, made in Flanders or Utrecht ca. 1350,<sup>75</sup> depicts a sea creature with large red horns like branches of coral. Though the image does

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Antwerp Art Patron and His Collection", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 6, 50 (1957): 74–83; reprinted in Held J., *Rubens and his Circle* (Princeton, 1982) 43–56.

<sup>71</sup> At that time, fossils were defined as any distinctive objects or materials dug up from or found lying on the surface of the earth. They were not yet identified as remains of organisms. See Rudwick M.J.S., *The Meaning of Fossils. Episodes in the History of Palaeontology*, 2nd edition (Chicago–London: 1985) 1–48.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Van Oostrom, *Maerlants Wereld* 210–224.

<sup>74</sup> James M.R., "The Bestiary", *History (The Quarterly Journal of the Historical Association)* 16, 61 (April 1931) 1–11; Burger P., *Het boek der natuur Jacob van Maerlant* (samenstelling en vertaling Peter Burger copyright 2002 dbnl) prologue, 7–9. [www.dbnl.nl](http://www.dbnl.nl) (accessed August 27, 2005).

<sup>75</sup> The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS. KA 16, folio 103<sup>v</sup>, column a1.



Fig. 8. Anonymous (Flanders or Utrecht) “*Cervus marinus*” in *Der naturen bloeme*, detail (ca. 1350). Parchment, 3.5 × 5.5 cm. The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS. KA 16, fol. 103v, col. a1. Image © Koninklijke Bibliotheek

not resemble seals, or even walruses, it does approximate Maerlant’s description of a creature with sharp horns.<sup>76</sup>

Van Eyck’s pictorial mode may be understood as a precursor to the sixteenth-century development of scientific classification through the use of observation and representation.<sup>77</sup> In van Eyck’s paintings, as in Gesner’s geological study, direct visual observation of actual specimens supplanted conceptions based primarily on textual characterizations of natural phenomena. In *The Ghent Altarpiece* (Fig. 9), Hubert and Jan meticulously recorded in oils the forms, coloration, and textures of keenly observed natural objects to create depictions of gemstones, coral, and fossils possessing an unprecedented naturalism. Geologist Kenneth Bé has analyzed the geological morphology of van Eyck’s fossil images and determined them to be highly accurate renderings

<sup>76</sup> ‘Sine horne te stekene pleghet’, Maerlant J. van, *Der naturen bloeme*, “Zeemonsters”, verse 222, line 8592.

<sup>77</sup> On scientific classification and illustration see: Rudwick, *The Meaning of Fossils*, 1–48.



Fig. 9. Jan and Hubert van Eyck, *The Ghent Altarpiece*, The Hermits, detail (1426–1432). Ghent, St. Baafskathedraal. Image © Sint Baafskathedraal Ghent

of white sandstone containing fossils of marine invertebrates.<sup>78</sup> This high degree of geological precision indicates that the artist produced the fossil images from direct observation of particular specimens, a practice that may have suggested an effective means of investigation for naturalists.

### Conclusion

Pictorial, literary, and biographical evidence demonstrates that van Eyck modeled his motto *Als ich can* on Maerlant's critical convention of validating his poetic methods in prologues to his works. The motto's

<sup>78</sup> Fossils belonged to a class of objects that were thought to possess magic properties. Known as 'thunderstones', they were believed to have been formed by lightning during thunderstorms. Bé K., "Geological Aspects of Jan van Eyck's *Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata*", in *Jan van Eyck: Two Paintings of 'Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata'*, ed. J. Watkins (Philadelphia: 1997) 88–95. Bé concludes, 'It is possible that the strata belong to the area that geologists call the Paris Basin, which covers most of France and southern Flanders.' (Ibid., 90).

derivation suggests that it functioned as a prologue to the artist's paintings, which invoked the principles of truth, clarity, and restraint. These findings indicate that interdisciplinary exchange shaped regional cultural identity in the Netherlands. In his motto, the painter vowed, like Dutch authors who distinguished their style from French writing, that he grounded his pictures upon authoritative sources and rendered truthful imagery in a disciplined style. Pictorial qualities that the artist promulgated stood in contradistinction to French styles of painting. His efforts to establish oil painting as a viable alternative to canonical art forms bespeak his artistic self-awareness. Van Eyck extended the vernacular mode from the venerable art of letters to the fledgling art of oil painting. Engaging in vernacular discourse through his art, he strengthened the cultural relevance of his emerging medium.

Van Eyck initiated a nonverbal form of art theory by engaging with critical concepts in a purely pictorial mode.<sup>79</sup> He reformulated poetic categories into conceptual foundations of artistic practice that were specific to painting. In order to adapt literary principles to picturing, the artist maximized his medium's representational potential. Bringing perceptual experience to bear as an authoritative source, he mobilized observation, visual analysis, and pictorial recording in an innovative artistic model. His method anticipated objective scientific classification, yet his art also afforded a new kind of subjective experience. The experience of recognizing correspondences between the visible world and the carefully articulated imagery that mirrors it may have stimulated in viewers a sense of visual immediacy, which was not elicited by the conventional patterns and stylized forms characteristic of earlier painting traditions. Maerlant's use of Dutch made his writings accessible to regional audiences beyond the Latin culture of the cloister and the French culture of the court. However, van Eyck's representa-

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<sup>79</sup> For insights on pictorial formulation of art theory, see Borchert T.-H., "Rogier's St. Luke: The Case for Corporate Identification" Marrow J., "Artistic Identity in Early Netherlandish Painting: The Place of Rogier van der Weyden's St. Luke Drawing the Virgin", both in *Rogier van der Weyden's "St. Luke Drawing the Virgin."* *Selected Essays in Context*, ed. C. Purtle (Turnhout: 1997) 61–81; 150–172. On the painting style of Cosmè Tura of Ferrara, Stephen Campbell posits, "Could artistic practice itself be seen to reflect critically, rather than passively, on those aspects of representation, of knowledge, artifice and truth, which appear in the discourses on verbal and visual fiction in the Renaissance?" Campbell S.J., *Cosmè Tura of Ferrara: Style, Politics and the Renaissance City, 1450–1495* (New Haven-London: 1997) 3. Smith, *The Artisanal World* 34, asserts that the painter of the Carrara herbal (1375–1400) 'articulated his methods not in treatises, but in paint'.

tional style gave his pictures an even more basic accessibility, one that interacted, at its most fundamental level, with a viewer's perceptual experience instead of with his or her literacy or prior pictorial knowledge. Rather than echoing a Latin cliché of the distant past, *Als ich can* heralds oil painting as a powerful new vernacular art.



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PICTORIAL BABEL:  
INVENTING THE FLEMISH VISUAL VERNACULAR

James J. Bloom\*

I. *Rethinking Vernacularity*

To a degree that might be thought unusual in the history of art, the works of the so-called Flemish Primitives comprise a pictorial style both instantly recognizable and intimately associated with a particular locale. The startling novelty of this *ars nova* originating in the Burgundian Netherlands circa 1420 engendered immediate international acclaim and, not surprisingly, wholesale imitation, such that the idiom introduced by painters such as Robert Campin, Jan van Eyck, and Rogier van der Weyden proved remarkably stable across an extended historical moment.<sup>1</sup> The familiar stillness of these fifteenth-century paintings was shattered, however, by the kaleidoscopic array of styles that emerged coincident with the efflorescence of Antwerp as a mercantile center at the turn of the sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Within a comparatively short span of years, panels exploring such divergent formal interests as Mannerism, Romanism, and myriad improvisations

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<sup>1</sup> The sustained and consistent reception of fifteenth-century Netherlandish painting can be inferred from the opprobrious remarks on Flemish art ascribed to Michelangelo by Francisco de Hollanda in his *Roman Dialogues*, on which see Agoston L.C., "Michelangelo as Voice versus Michelangelo as Text", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 36 (2006) 135–167. Consider, by contrast, the profound stylistic variation evinced by the most prominent painters working on the Italian peninsula throughout the fifteenth century.

<sup>2</sup> Friedländer M.J., *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 14 vols. (Leiden: 1967), provides a ready survey of the range and scope of pictorial production in early sixteenth-century Antwerp. On the economic expansion of Antwerp, see Van der Wee H., *The Growth of the Antwerp Market and European Economy* (The Hague: 1963); Van der Stock J., ed., *Antwerp: Story of a Metropolis*, ex. cat. (Antwerp: 1993).

modeled after the diabolical fantasies of Hieronymus Bosch began to appear alongside paintings perpetuating or revisiting the work of the Flemish Primitives.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, for the first time in the Netherlandish tradition, individual painters exercised the conspicuous and deliberate choice of multiple pictorial manners: artists such as Quentin Metsys and Jan Gossaert worked in a pronounced variety of idioms, ranging from the Italianate to the archaic.<sup>4</sup> The profusion of styles that characterized early pictorial production in Antwerp was matched by a proliferation of subject matter: whereas the preponderance of fifteenth-century panel painting was largely confined to the production of devotional images and portraits, sixteenth-century Antwerp witnessed the rise of multiple pictorial genres, from landscapes to tavern scenes, from still lifes to classical histories.<sup>5</sup>

This riotous irruption of visual interests has proven remarkably resistant to the orchestration of a coherent explanatory narrative. Recently, however, a number of attempts have been made to clarify the protean complexion of sixteenth-century Flemish painting through investigation of the concept of vernacularity. In particular, the vernacular has been yoked to an evaluation of style and subject understood in terms of a polemic between 'Flemish' and 'Italianate' modes, and harnessed to the figures of Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Frans Floris, respectively [Figs. 1, 2].<sup>6</sup> Identified as a self-conscious champion of an autochthonous pictorial tradition, Bruegel's art is thought to both consolidate and reify the conventions of fifteenth- and early

<sup>3</sup> See Ainsworth M., *Gerard David: Purity of Vision in an Age of Transition* (New York: 1998); Van den Brink P., ed., *ExtravagAnt! A Forgotten Chapter of Antwerp Painting, 1500–1530*, ex. cat. (Antwerp: 2005); Marlier G., *La Renaissance flamande: Pierre Coeck d'Alost* (Brussels: 1966); Silver L., "Second Bosch: Family Resemblance and the Marketing of Art", *Kunst voor de Markt/Art for the Market, 1500–1700. Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 50 (2000) 30–57.

<sup>4</sup> Silver L., *The Paintings of Quinten Massys* (Montclair, NJ: 1984); Mensger A., *Jan Gossaert: Die niederländische Kunst zu Beginn der Neuzeit* (Berlin: 2002). The term *genre* is used here with caution, with an emphasis on its colloquial rather than critical sense. The concept of theoretically defined and readily identifiable categories implied within modern discourse on genre would most likely not have been available to the sixteenth-century viewer. On this position, see Falkenburg R., "Landscape", *Kritische Berichte* 35, 3 (2007) 45–50.

<sup>5</sup> Silver L., *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes: The Rise of Pictorial Genres in the Antwerp Market* (Philadelphia: 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Meadow M., "Bruegel's *Procession to Calvary*, Aemulatio and the Space of Vernacular Style", *Pieter Bruegel. Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 47 (1996) 181–205, 196.



Fig. 1. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Tower of Babel* (1563).  
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum



Fig. 2. Frans Floris, *The Gods of Olympus* (ca. 1550).  
Antwerp, KMSK



sixteenth-century Netherlandish visual culture, as well as adumbrate myriad critical and material concerns that have come to define a significant body of seventeenth-century Northern art.<sup>7</sup> Paintings like the Vienna *Tower of Babel*, to take but one example, have been read as representative of a Flemish vernacular style, seamlessly synthesizing a panoply of visual and cultural practices by dint of their apparently unmannered naturalism.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, the art of Frans Floris is held to exhibit the conspicuous, if awkward, absorption of formal and thematic principles originated on the Italian peninsula.<sup>9</sup> Floris's manifest investment in contemporary Renaissance theory is sometimes said to impute a cosmopolitan character to his work, associating the artist with the broad international diffusion of humanist discourse. Moreover, the style associated in Antwerp with the paintings of Floris is tacitly identified as normative or dominant, such that Bruegel's work is commonly read as a deliberate renunciation – perhaps even repudiation – of this cosmopolitan manner.<sup>10</sup>

That the immediate and palpable differences between the works of these artists would have registered before a contemporary audience is beyond dispute, and in fact it would appear that both painters figured forth in a nascent art theoretical debate that emerged in certain intellectual circles in Antwerp during the second half of the sixteenth century. Lucas de Heere's *Den Hof en Boomgaerd der Poësie* (1565) includes within its pages the now-familiar 'Invective against a certain painter who scoffed at the painters of Antwerp', a defense of the art of Floris against the criticisms of an unnamed antagonist, often assumed to be Pieter Bruegel.<sup>11</sup> The 'Invective' refutes the accusations of cloying

<sup>7</sup> Useful historiographic reviews can be found in Kavalier E.M., *Pieter Bruegel: Parables of Order and Enterprise* (Cambridge: 1999); Meadow M. "Putting Bruegel in his Place: Contextual Studies of Pieter Bruegel the Elder", *Pieter Bruegel. Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 47 (1996) 7–13.

<sup>8</sup> Freedberg D., "Allusion and Topicality in the Work of Pieter Bruegel: The Implications of a Forgotten Polemic", in Freedberg D. (ed.), *The Prints of Pieter Bruegel the Elder*, ex. cat. (Tokyo: 1989) 63.

<sup>9</sup> Van de Velde C., *Frans Floris (1519/20–1570): leven en werken* (Brussels: 1975).

<sup>10</sup> Meadow, M., "Bruegel's *Procession to Calvary*", *passim*; Freedberg D., "Allusion and Topicality", 62–63; Ten Brink Goldsmith J., "Pieter Bruegel the Elder and the Matter of Italy", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 23 (1992) 205–234.

<sup>11</sup> Freedberg, "Allusion and Topicality" 61–64. For the most recent argument and literature, see Kaschek B., "Weder römisch, noch antik? Pieter Bruegels Verleumdung des Appelles in neuer Deutung", in Kamecke G., Klein B., and Müller J. (eds.), *Antike als Konzept: Lesarten in Kunst, Literatur und Politik* (Berlin: 2009) 167–179. My thanks to Todd Richardson for this reference.

artifice purportedly leveled at Floris, and scorns the 'certain painter' for producing artless paintings unmarked by any trace of having traveled to Rome.

The cultural implications of de'Heere's commentary and its denotation of a burgeoning theoretical discourse on pictorial style notwithstanding, I would nevertheless like to suggest that the oppositional framework within which Bruegel and Floris are consistently set advances a false polemic – a situation complicated, rather than clarified, by conventional art historical readings of vernacularity. The intensive focus on style and subject as the definitive constituents of the vernacular encourages form to be abstracted from objecthood, and implies that the poles figured by Bruegel and Floris represent ideal, unalloyed exempla of vernacular and cosmopolitan modes (and that by extension, those artists whose work falls somewhere in between would be understood as hybridized).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, an exclusive attention to style and subject ignores conditions of medium and display that inflected the historical engagement with the objects themselves. For example, Bruegel is known to have worked in a wide range of media, from panels large and small to painted plates, and from paintings on cheap linen or canvas to prints. The cost of such objects varied significantly, and canvas paintings and prints could be distributed and sold widely, such that the audiences for Bruegel's work were potentially quite divergent – a circumstance that undermines the assertion that there was a uniform understanding of Bruegel's images that could be categorized as 'vernacular'. At the same time, Bruegel and Floris were known to attract many of the same patrons. In fact, the works of both artists were often famously hung in the same homes of the Antwerp elite, and it would thus seem unlikely that the work of these artists was recognized as diametrically opposed.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps more important, these conditions suggest that style itself was not a definitive or distinguishing marker of taste or identity for the sixteenth-century Flemish viewer: it is improbable that the possession of a Bruegel painting signified an ideological affinity for indigenous pictorial traditions, nor that owning a Floris signaled committed cosmopolitanism. Rather, it seems plausible to assert that such paintings articulated the interests of their

<sup>12</sup> Meadow, "Bruegel's *Procession to Calvary*" 182.

<sup>13</sup> Buchanan I., "The Collection of Nicolaes Jongelinck: II. The 'Months' by Pieter Bruegel the Elder", *The Burlington Magazine* 132 (1990) 541–550.



owners in terms that were *functionally* quite similar, and that therefore the issue of vernacularity might be more productively approached through the consideration of utility than through the analysis of style.

This conceptual shift requires a reassessment of terms. Understood to encapsulate local, indigenous, or popular practices, the vernacular is typically framed in contradistinction to the cosmopolitan, the international, or the elite.<sup>14</sup> Within this oppositional rubric, elite modes of discourse are comparatively timeless and unbounded, properties illuminated by the enduring and international character of early modern aristocratic culture, for example. The universality of such cultural models depends upon a codified inflexibility in the articulation of ideals that both conserves its own historical past and ensures its posterity. By contrast, the vernacular implicitly conditions its own reception by virtue of its role as a marker of difference: it at once identifies and differentiates what is most often a culturally, geographically, and temporally finite community.<sup>15</sup> The vernacular is inherently momentary, topical, and marginal. Yet it is also relentlessly fluid and appropriative, constantly shifting its contours as it is employed – a characterization that comprehends the vernacular as both an indicator and an agent of change, the analysis of which need not be constrained within a simple binary framework.

Precisely because of its inherent contingency and contemporaneity, the vernacular is in many ways only realized through use. A necessarily social mode of communication, the term is perhaps better understood as an action than as an idea – that is, as an instrument employed for a particular purpose, as opposed to an expression of a given position.<sup>16</sup> This conception not only underscores the agency of the vernacular and thus calls attention to its affective potential, but also allows for the possibility that vernacularity need not be tied so closely to the profession of a particular intellectual or ideological posture. What is more, such an elastic approach seems especially suited to assess the dynamic, appropriative character of the vernacular. Rather than attempting to view a given historical vernacular as an artifact adduced to emblem-

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<sup>14</sup> Somerset F. – Watson N., “On Vernacular”, in Somerset F. – Watson N., (eds.), *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity* (University Park, PA: 2003) ix–xiii.

<sup>15</sup> Pollock S., “Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History”, *Public Culture* 12 (2000) 594.

<sup>16</sup> This position is deeply influenced by *ibid.*, 593.

tize a fixed cultural mentality, then, reading vernacularity in terms of function promotes attention to the process of cultural creation and transmission.

Marshalling this rubric for the consideration of sixteenth-century Flemish art encourages an expansive critical lens that holds the potential to illuminate connections and continuities between cultural and historical practices that have otherwise remained obscured by a more narrow focus on style and subject matter. Such breadth is accomplished, at least in part, by virtue of the fact that the consideration of use – or more precisely, of instrumentality – requires an assessment of the conditions under which art was experienced in the sixteenth-century Low Countries.<sup>17</sup> To the extent that the function of images has been interrogated within the historiography of early Netherlandish painting, it has been approached most often through the analysis of reception: typically, a range of extrapictorial information – literary, political, philosophical, theological – is proffered in support of an interpretation grounded in the process of ideation.<sup>18</sup> Function, in such instances, is linked explicitly, perhaps even exclusively, to the production of meaning derived from abstract associations brought to bear by the imaginative faculties of an ideal viewer. But the significance of an image is not solely defined by what it represents.<sup>19</sup> Paintings were presented in physical spaces whose contexts framed certain expectations for behavior – behavior, it should be noted, that was in all likelihood vastly different from the interpretive habits conditioned by the modern museum or by contemporary scholarship – such that pictures must also be understood to have been defined *socially*. The obverse is also almost certainly true: pictures defined their viewers socially

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<sup>17</sup> The conceptual foundation for these arguments depend upon the insights found in Summers D., “Conditions and Conventions: On the Disanalogy of Art and Language”, in Kemal S. – Gaskell I., (eds.), *The Language of Art History* (Cambridge: 1991) 181–212. Summers work is elaborated at length in *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (London-New York: 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Panofsky’s palpable disinterest in questions of social engagement evinced in his formulation of iconology as a critical method was noted in some of the earliest reviews of his work. See, for example, Julius Held’s review of Panofsky’s *Early Netherlandish Painting in Art Bulletin* 37 (1955) 205–234. The study of social context popularized in subsequent decades has nonetheless remained largely grounded in a mentalist approach that cleaves closely to Panofsky’s fundamental emphasis on ideation. An excellent analysis of recent exceptions to this characterization in the study of late medieval art can be found in Williamson B., “Altarpices, Liturgy, and Devotion”, *Speculum* 79 (2004) 341–406.

<sup>19</sup> Summers, “Conditions and Conventions” 206.

as well, reflecting a potentially stabilizing or authoritative public image of their audience. The questions framed by these assertions are thus, What did sixteenth-century Flemish pictures *do*? And what did sixteenth-century Flemish people do with pictures?

The pursuit of these interests must necessarily begin with a restored attention to physical objecthood, to the ‘thingness’ of the images in question. Though often taken for granted, the issue of medium is of central importance to such concerns. Images produced in tapestries, illuminated manuscripts, paintings, and prints all signified through the very stuffs from which they were made; moreover, pictures were often displayed in conversation with other images in multiple media, collectively shaping and shaped by the spaces in which they were deployed. Yet the historical study of early Netherlandish painting remains largely hermetic and relatively undifferentiated: insufficient attention is paid to the functional relationships between painting and other visual media, and distinctions between different kinds of painting – for example, between panel painting and linen painting – are seldom explored.<sup>20</sup> This pretermission is especially consequential when considered against the fact that, in the sixteenth-century Low Countries, painting had not yet been codified in terms of its social use. Previously deployed chiefly for devotional purposes and subject to an exponential increase in production volume over the course of the century, cultural engagements with the medium of painting as a vehicle of visual communication remained demonstrably fluid.<sup>21</sup> It is this communicative aspect of the medium of painting – its function as an instrument in the structuring of social relations – that I suggest can be most usefully understood in terms of the vernacular. In a certain sense, the medium is the message: the historical emergence of easel painting is itself an example of visual vernacularity in action. Though vernacularity should by no means be confined to discussions of painting, this essay takes painting as its focus precisely because of its potential to model how pictures of all types and in all media were utilized in the early modern Low Countries. The arguments that follow advance

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<sup>20</sup> On linen painting, see Wolfthal D., *The Beginnings of Early Netherlandish Canvas Painting: 1400–1530* (Cambridge: 1989). See also Bloom J., “Why Painting?” in De Marchi N. – Van Miegroet H. (eds.), *Mapping Markets for Paintings in Europe, 1450–1750* (Turnhout: 2006) 17–31.

<sup>21</sup> Martens M. – Peeters N., “Paintings in Antwerp Houses (1532–1567)”, in De Marchi N. – Van Miegroet H., (eds.), *Mapping Markets for Paintings in Europe, 1450–1750* (Turnhout: 2006) 35–51. These arguments will be explored more fully below.

this project, averring that the urban patriciate of Antwerp adapted the medium of painting to strategies of social use, communication, and engagement that had previously defined the elite practices of aristocrats and humanists, and in so doing participated in the fashioning of a new, vernacular function for the painted image: that singularly modern product of visual culture, the easel painting.

## II. *The Spaces of Flemish Painting*

The relationships between visual objects and the spaces in which they were experienced provide the initial thread taken up here. Although historical evidence supporting the anthropological study of the sixteenth-century Flemish home is limited, a range of recent scholarship analyzes the conditions that shaped the experience of domestic art in Antwerp.<sup>22</sup> In particular, a series of studies by Maximiliaan Martens and Natasja Peeters supplies quantitative data and careful analyses of multiple sixteenth-century household inventories sampled from the Antwerp archives; the general trends observed by the authors are especially compelling.<sup>23</sup> First and foremost, their findings reveal a significant increase in the total number of paintings maintained in individual homes over the course of the sixteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the authors note a marked shift in the display of paintings from the more private rooms on the upper levels of the residence to the more public spaces located downstairs, intended for the entertainment of guests.<sup>25</sup> These data would seem to suggest that the burgeoning demand for painting in sixteenth-century Antwerp corresponded not only to a concomitant change in the spaces in which they were displayed, but

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<sup>22</sup> See the several essays in De Jong J. – Ramakers B. – Roodenburg H., et al., (eds.), *Wooncultuur. Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek 51* (2000). See also De Jonge K. – Ottenheym K., (eds.), *Unity and Discontinuity: Architectural Relationships between the Southern and Northern Low Countries (1530–1700)* (Turnhout: 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Martens – Peeters, “Paintings in Antwerp Houses”; idem, “Antwerp Painting Before Iconoclasm: Considerations on the Quantification of Taste”, in Cavaciocchi S., (ed.), *Economica e arte: Secc. XIII–XVIII* (Prato: 2002), 875–894; Peeters N. – Martens M., “Piety and Splendor: The Art Collection of Antwerp Burgomaster Adriaan Hertsen”, in Golhany A. – Mochizuki M.M. – Vergara L., (eds.), *In his Milieu: Essays on Netherlandish Art in Memory of John Michael Montias* (Amsterdam: 2006) 347–374.

<sup>24</sup> Martens – Peeters, “Paintings in Antwerp Houses” 39, 43.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 45, 50.

also, by extension, to a shift in their social function. Indeed, as Martens and Peeters note, 'Apparently, paintings were discovered by the middle classes as consumer goods during this period in Antwerp. Perhaps they were no longer only bought for their devotional function but were also seen as available luxury products'.<sup>26</sup> These developments parallel yet another significant shift in the cultural attitude towards painting revealed through analysis of the inventories. While the middle classes 'discovered' painting by emulating the increased interest in panels demonstrated by the urban patriciate during the early decades of the sixteenth century, those elite patrons themselves continued to model their own cultural practices after the aristocracy – a point supported by the conspicuous consumption of tapestries among Antwerp patricians prior to midcentury.<sup>27</sup> However, Martens and Peeters posit that in response to the symbolic encroachment of the middle classes – realized through their newfound appetite for readily available paintings – the urban patriciate turned to the collection of 'paintings of particular excellence', such as those possessed by the likes of Antwerp mint masters Jean Noirot and Nicolaes Jongelink.<sup>28</sup> Building upon this contention, I suggest in turn that the medium of painting was seized upon as an instrument by which the urban patriciate of Antwerp might differentiate itself both from the infringement of the middle classes and from the ostentation of the aristocracy – an argument perhaps best advanced through a focused assessment of the uses to which Jongelink put his now famous collection of paintings.

Nicolaes Jongelink's investment in the arts of Antwerp is unusually well documented.<sup>29</sup> In addition to owning a version of Bruegel's *Tower of Babel*, Jongelink kept two series of paintings by Floris – *The Labors of Hercules* and *The Seven Liberal Arts* – as well as Bruegel's cycle of *The Labors of the Months* at Ter Beke, his *speelhuis*, or recreational suburban residence, on the outskirts of Antwerp.<sup>30</sup> That Floris's

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>27</sup> On the middle class emulation of the urban elite's interest in painting, see *ibid.*, 46. On the urban patriciate's appropriation of the nobility's taste for tapestry, see Peeters – Martens, "Piety and Splendor" 353.

<sup>28</sup> Martens – Peeters, "Paintings in Antwerp Houses" 43.

<sup>29</sup> Buchanan I., "The Collection of Nicolaes Jongelink: I. 'Bacchus and the Planets' by Jacques Jongelink", *The Burlington Magazine* 132 (1990) 102–113; *idem*, "The Collection of Nicolaes Jongelink: II".

<sup>30</sup> On the phenomenon of sixteenth-century Brabantine *speelhuizen*, see Soly H. *Urbanisme en kapitalisme te antwerpen in de 16de eeuw: De stedenbouwkundige en industriële ondernemingen van Gilbert van Schoonbeke* (Brussels: 1977). See also the

paintings shared wall space with Bruegel's work in an environment employed expressly for entertainment suggests the likelihood that, despite their disparate pictorial styles, these painting cycles have far more in common than scholars have often claimed.<sup>31</sup> Notably, though the subjects pictured by both artists were wildly divergent, they each depicted motifs that were decidedly novel relative to the conventions of pictorial representation at the time: Bruegel's peasant paintings participated in what was then a comparatively new theme in that medium, and Floris's mythological subjects were largely without precedent in sixteenth-century Flemish painting.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, however incongruous in appearance, the disparate novelties of the subjects depicted in these paintings may well have overlapped in their meaning. Iain Buchanan has suggested that both series participated in an overarching iconographic program that unified many of the seemingly discordant commissions Jongelinck installed at Ter Beke.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, Buchanan posits that Bruegel's *Labors of the Months*, Floris's *Seven Liberal Arts*, and yet another series – an unfinished group of life-size bronze statues commissioned by Jongelinck from his brother Jacques that depict *Bacchus* and the *Seven Planets* – were thematically linked through their participation in a decorative scheme grounded in the representation of astrological topoi.<sup>34</sup>

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discussion in Onuf A., "Local Terrains: Imaging the Vernacular Landscape in Sixteenth-Century Antwerp", in this volume.

<sup>31</sup> Van de Velde C., "The Labours of Hercules, a Lost Series of Paintings by Frans Floris", *The Burlington Magazine* 107 (1965) 114–123, offers the most thorough reading of Floris's *Hercules* cycle. See also idem, "Painters and Patrons in Antwerp in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in Vlieghe H. – Balis A. – Van de Velde C. (eds.), *Concept, Design & Execution in Flemish Painting (1550–1700)* (Turnhout: 2000) 29–42. Nine of the ten paintings are no longer extant; their subject is known through engraved copies made by Cornelis Cort.

<sup>32</sup> On the development of peasant imagery in the sixteenth century, see Stewart A., *Before Bruegel: Sebald Beham and the Origins of Peasant Festive Imagery* (Aldershot: 2008). On the scarcity of paintings depicting mythological subjects in sixteenth-century Antwerp, see Healy F., "Bedrooms and Banquets: Mythology in Sixteenth-Century Flemish Painting", in Vlieghe H. – Balis A. – Van de Velde C., (eds.), *Concept, Design & Execution in Flemish Painting (1550–1700)*, (Turnhout: 2000) 73–96. The observations of Martens – Peeters, "Paintings in Antwerp Houses" 47, 50, corroborate the relative scarcity of mythological and peasant scenes in Antwerp inventories prior to the second half of the sixteenth century.

<sup>33</sup> Buchanan, "The Collection of Nicolaes Jongelinck: I".

<sup>34</sup> Buchanan, "The Collection of Nicolaes Jongelinck: I" 112, observes that the seven liberal arts were in some instances associated with the seven planets, and that the relationship between the planets and the months was still more commonly maintained.

The propinquity of these celebrated works and the possibility that all served to elaborate a particular unifying theme for their patron have done little to blunt the force of arguments that hold the works of Bruegel and Floris to be unequivocally opposed: each is still largely thought to distill Flemish vernacular and cosmopolitan Italianate interests to their quiddity. And yet what is revealed through the analysis of the physical conditions in which they were experienced is that neither Bruegel nor Floris present unadulterated expressions of the intellectual and ideological positions within which they have traditionally been located. An increasing number of studies have drawn attention not only to the discursive humanist interests that may have shaped the intellectual expression of Bruegel's work, but also to the subtle evidence of Bruegel's having absorbed various aspects of Italian pictorial practice as well (the possible allusion to the Roman Colosseum in Jongelick's version of the *Tower of Babel* being perhaps the most familiar example).<sup>35</sup> By the same token, the *Labors of Hercules* does not represent the canonical twelve labors, but rather is sourced from a late medieval treatise, the *Libellus de imaginibus deorum*, which was in turn derived from the *Ovide Moralisé*, suggesting that Floris's paintings may well have been as rooted in late-medieval moral allegory as in Italian Renaissance humanism.<sup>36</sup>

What is more, when dislodged from their assumed dependence upon Italian or classical models, a number of the works in Jongelick's collection can be associated with local histories that may have informed encounters with such objects, perhaps chief among them Jacques Jongelick's bronze *Bacchus* [Fig. 3]. Though it is unlikely that at the time Nicolaes Jongelick died in 1570 he had taken possession of the sculpture, it is believed that its commission dates to approximately

<sup>35</sup> See, among others, Koerner J.L., "Unmasking the World: Bruegel's Ethnography", *Common Knowledge* 10 (2004) 220–251; Ten Brink Goldsmith, "Pieter Bruegel the Elder and the Matter of Italy"; Freedberg, "Allusion and Topicality" 63; and idem, "The Life of Pieter Bruegel the Elder", in Freedberg D. (ed.), *The Prints of Pieter Bruegel the Elder*, ex. cat. (Tokyo: 1989) 53–65, esp. 29, where Freedberg identifies Bruegel's peasant paintings as the Flemish equivalents of the monumental figure paintings of the Italian High Renaissance.

<sup>36</sup> Buchanan, "The Collection of Nicolaes Jongelick: I" 110. A discussion of the *Libellus de imaginibus deorum* can be found in Seznec J., *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (New York: 1953) 170–179. On the relationship of the *Ovide Moralisé* to the classical tradition, see Javitch D., "Rescuing Ovid from the Allegorizers", *Comparative Literature* 30 (1978) 97–107.





Fig. 3. Filips Galle after Jacques Jongelinck, *Bacchus* (1586).  
London, British Museum

1566.<sup>37</sup> By 1585, the *Bacchus* was installed as a fountain in the square before the Town Hall of Antwerp, as recorded in an account detailing the triumphal entry of Alessandro Farnese on August 27 of that year [Fig. 4]; ironically, the entry celebrated Farnese's successful prosecution of the siege of Antwerp, during which Jongelinck's home, Ter Beke – the location originally intended for the *Bacchus* – was destroyed.<sup>38</sup> In his discussion of the sculpture, Iain Buchanan notes that, unlike Jongelinck's figures of the *Seven Planets*, which seem to correspond to the descriptions of the gods offered in the *Libellus de imaginibus deorum*, the *Bacchus* marked a distinct departure from that text; Buchanan compares it instead to the tradition of northern European carnival figures.<sup>39</sup> In fact, the record of a fifteenth-century triumphal entry hosted by the town of Mons in honor of Charles the Bold

<sup>37</sup> Buchanan, "The Collection of Nicolaes Jongelinck: I" 105.

<sup>38</sup> Buchanan, "The Collection of Nicolaes Jongelinck: II" 547.

<sup>39</sup> Buchanan, "The Collection of Nicolaes Jongelinck: I" 110.

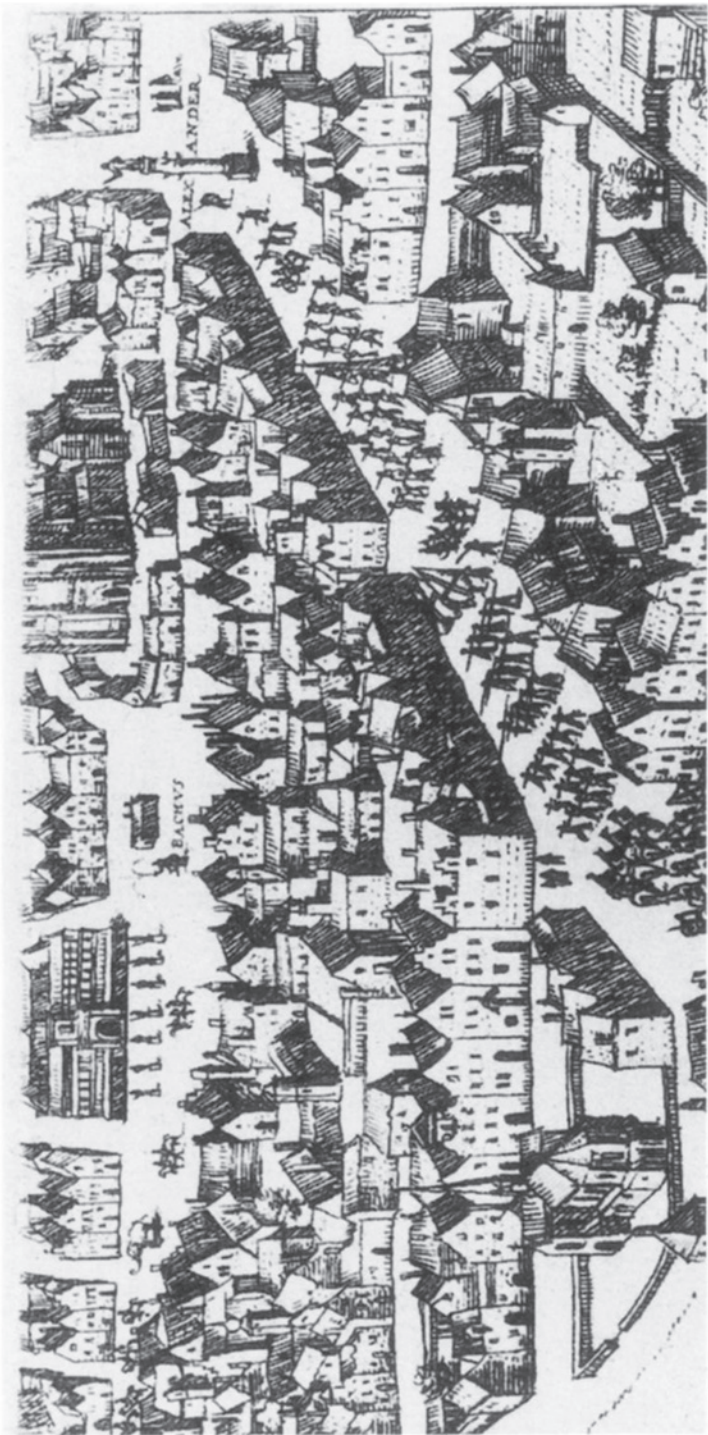


Fig. 4. Frans Hogenberg, *Triumphal Entry of Alexander Farnese to Antwerp* (1585) London, Warburg Institute. Detail

contains a description of a *tableau vivant* staged in a fountain in the town square in which one Simon Storet, of a 'monstrous and admirable corpulence', performed the role of Bacchus while sitting bestride a barrel of wine.<sup>40</sup> The description matches Jongelinck's sculpture neatly, and the circumstances of the Mons *tableau* correspond almost exactly with the display of the *Bacchus* sculpture for Farnese's triumphal entry in 1585. These similarities suggest the likelihood that Jacques Jongelinck's bronze *Bacchus* may well have been equally familiar to its audience both through local, late-medieval visual traditions as well as through contemporary humanist discourse derived from Italy. In turn, these examples allow the possibility that the works of both Bruegel and Floris might be more profitably understood as synthesizing multiple pictorial and intellectual traditions, rather than essentializing dichotomous cultural trajectories.

Such observations must contend against one of the more pervasive (if unobtrusive) historical arguments that has shaped the evaluation of sixteenth-century Flemish art, namely, Panofsky's 'principle of disjunction'.<sup>41</sup> Panofsky famously held that the reuniting of form and content in art, together with a conscious sense of the historical distance separating antiquity from the space of the fifteenth-century viewer, marked one of the defining achievements of Renaissance aesthetics. This perception of unity and distance was explicitly understood in contrast to what was viewed as the medieval propensity towards self-identifying with antique models, and thus collapsing and conflating the contemporary and the classical. By implication, the unity privileged by Panofsky in the definition of Renaissance – read, humanist – art should be unambiguous and absolute. Viewed from this perspective, it is not surprising that the art of Floris has been upheld as an example of unadulterated adherence to Italian Renaissance art theory, nor that Bruegel's work has posed challenges to scholars seeking to understand that artist's relationship to his known humanist patrons.

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<sup>40</sup> Devillers L., "Les Séjours des ducs de Bourgogne en Hainaut: 1427–1482", *Compte rendu des séances de la Commission Royale d'Histoire ou recueil de ses bulletins* [Belgium]. 4th ser., 6 (1879) 323–468, quotation at 366. I am profoundly grateful to Jesse Hurlbut for sharing this reference with me.

<sup>41</sup> Panofsky E., *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: 1960). The arguments presented here are grounded in the analysis found in Alpers S., "Style is What You Make It: The Visual Arts Once Again", in Lang B. (ed.), *The Concept of Style* (Philadelphia: 1979) 95–118, esp. 105–6. See also Nagel A. – Wood C., "Toward a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism", *Art Bulletin* 87 (2005) 403–415; and Kubler G., "History: Or Anthropology: Of Art?", *Critical Inquiry* 1 (1975) 757–767.

Yet constraining the analysis of sixteenth-century Flemish art within such a binary framework has proven decidedly limiting. The paintings of Bruegel and Floris are not either local or cosmopolitan, popular or elite, medieval or Renaissance; rather, they are complex amalgams of such interests. Moreover, their compound natures do not require that they be understood as compromised, falling somewhere between the idealized conceptions of unity and disjunction framed by Panofsky. Instead, their relationship to the past was multifaceted, and selectively appropriated a range of cultural and historical traditions that were synthesized in the articulation of a local, vernacular practice that defined identity through the conventions of instrumentality to which they were put. And perhaps nowhere was the appropriative character of this visual vernacular more evident than in the very spaces within which the works of artists such as Bruegel and Floris were hung.

### III. *Translating the Burgundian Past*

Let's return for a moment to Nicolaes Jongelinck's household at Ter Beke. The work of Claudia Goldstein argues convincingly that Jongelinck used *The Labors of the Months* to adorn his dining room, a physical context replete with cultural significance.<sup>42</sup> Goldstein connects the display of images in sixteenth-century Antwerp dining rooms to the humanist discourse modeled in Erasmus's 'Feast' colloquies, which narrate convivial gatherings around the dinner table whose conversations not infrequently turned to the images that surrounded the company.<sup>43</sup> The dining room is also identified as a site of humanist intellectual exchange by Margaret Sullivan, who asserts that the kitchen scenes of Pieter Aertsen would have stimulated members of the middle class to display their familiarity with satire ancient and modern during social engagements at table.<sup>44</sup> In drawing attention to the dining room as a venue for entertainments that may have advanced humanist

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<sup>42</sup> Goldstein C., "Artifacts of Domestic Life: Bruegel's Paintings in the Flemish Home", *Woencultuur. Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 51 (2000) 173–193; idem, "Keeping Up Appearances: The Social Significance of Domestic Decoration in Antwerp, 1508–1600" (PhD diss., Columbia, 2003). See also Gibson W., *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter* (Berkeley: 2006). The specific rooms appointed with the two painted cycles by Floris remain unknown.

<sup>43</sup> Goldstein, "Artifacts of Domestic Life" 182–184.

<sup>44</sup> Sullivan M., "Aertsen's Kitchen and Market Scenes: Audience and Innovation in Northern Art", *Art Bulletin* 81 (1999) 236–266, 255–257.

ideals, both authors note the appreciable incidence of paintings hung in such spaces mentioned in contemporary accounts.<sup>45</sup> It should be noted, however, that such practices were comparatively recent – a fact underscored by the analyses of Martens and Peeters discussed previously. Allowing that the nascent tendency to display paintings in the public spaces of middle class homes was modeled upon the practices of the elite encourages the exploration of historical connections between visual traditions that are often assumed to be unrelated. To wit, the exhibition of paintings as visual complements to the lavish entertainments pursued by sixteenth-century Flemish burghers might be understood to derive, *mutatis mutandis*, from the display of tapestries common to the celebrated banquets of the fifteenth-century Burgundian nobility.<sup>46</sup> What this permits, among a host of other possibilities, is the assertion that the decoration of domestic spaces can be linked both to the spread of new humanist practices and to the adaptation of indigenous precedents. In turn, the elaboration of the relatively new interest in using paintings to adorn the domestic interior exhibited by the middle class in sixteenth-century Antwerp can be read as synthesizing multiple elite modes into the articulation of a particular, local vernacular. These claims are supported by the physical characteristics of the paintings themselves and by the spaces of their display.

When comparing Bruegel's *Labors of the Months* and Floris's *Labors of Hercules*, for example, among the more striking features of each is their unusually large size: the six paintings of Bruegel's cycle all measured roughly 162 × 117 cm, while the smallest of the ten canvases that comprised the *Labors of Hercules* was thought to have spanned 212.5 × 141.5 cm [Figs. 5, 6]. The consistent dimensions of Bruegel's *Labors of the Months* correspond neatly with the standardized sizes employed for the production of *waterverfdoeken* – 'watercolor' paintings executed on cheap linen and produced in almost industrial quantities during the sixteenth-century in the nearby city of Mechelen, where Bruegel was known to have worked and perhaps trained.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> See also Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter* 106–123.

<sup>46</sup> To be clear, the object of middle class emulation identified by Martens and Peeters in their study of Antwerp homes is not the nobility, but the wealthiest members of the urban patriciate; the authors do not advance the possibility that the cultural function of paintings in sixteenth-century Antwerp might be analogous to the display of tapestries by the nobility.

<sup>47</sup> I cannot adequately thank Dr. Joost vander Auwera, Senior Curator at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels, for sharing both this information and the following citations with me; I am deeply indebted to him for his generosity. The relationship





Fig. 5. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Hay Harvest* (1559).  
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art



Fig. 6. Cornelis Cort after Frans Floris, *Hercules and Atlas*  
(1563). Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek

It was common practice in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries for watercolor or linen paintings to be used as inexpensive substitutes for tapestries.<sup>48</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, in functioning as a means of substitute acquisition for the elite medium of tapestry, linen paintings served as an instrument by which painted images came to be hung on the walls of domestic interiors in the early modern period, and in so doing established a functional model that was later adapted for more expensive panel paintings.<sup>49</sup> The dimensions of the paintings displayed in Jongelinck's dining room at Ter Beke thus corresponded precisely with a standardized pictorial format that was commonly employed in the emulation of tapestries.

Jongelinck likely displayed his paintings in ways that are perhaps still more conspicuously redolent of tapestry. The monumental scale of the three series of paintings should be imagined to have occupied the near entirety of the respective rooms in which they were hung, dominating the walls of each space in a manner that, adjusting for the likely scale of the rooms, approached the model offered by conventions of use native to the display of tapestry by the aristocracy.<sup>50</sup> Specifically, the nobility exploited the architectonic character of tapestry, using the monumental woven pictures to frame various events with images that were thematically suited to the activities pursued before them. For example, in the fifteenth century, Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, commissioned a series of tapestries depicting the story of Gideon that was regularly hung at chapter meetings of the Order of the

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between Bruegel's formats and those of *watervferdoeken* was first observed in Glück G., *Bruegels Gemälde* (Vienna: 1932) 13. It was brought to the attention of modern scholars by Wied A., *Lucas und Marten van Valckenborch, (1535–1597 und 1534–1612): Das Gesamtwerk mit kritischem Oeuvrekatalog* (Freren: 1990) 17 and footnote 47 with reference to Glück and to Auner M., "Pieter Bruegel – Umrisse eines Lebensbildes", *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* 52 (1956) 78, footnote 131. Dr. Vander Auwera first presented his research on these observations in a paper entitled "Format(s): Its Meaning and Use in the Art and Trade of Western Painting During the 16th and 17th Centuries", at the Historians of Netherlandish Art Conference in Antwerp on March 16, 2002. On the production of *watervferdoeken* in sixteenth-century Mechelen, see De Marchi N. – Van Miegroet H., "The Antwerp-Mechelen Production and Export Complex", in Golhany A. – Mochizuki M.M. – Vergara L. (eds.), *In his Milieu: Essays on Netherlandish Art in Memory of John Michael Montias* (Amsterdam: 2006) 133–147.

<sup>48</sup> Wolfthal, *The Beginnings of Early Netherlandish Canvas Painting* 5.

<sup>49</sup> Bloom, "Why Painting?" esp. 31.

<sup>50</sup> Campbell T., *Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence*, ex. cat. (New York: 2002).



Golden Fleece, such that participants were surrounded by narratives that corresponded to the intellectual program of the event.<sup>51</sup> By comparison, the rustic activities described in Bruegel's *Labors of the Months* displayed in Jongelinck's dining room at Ter Beke comprised subjects suited to humanist discourse conducted during dinner parties in the convivium tradition.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps more interesting still, Goldstein observes that members of the urban patriciate with whom Jongelinck associated were known to conduct *tafelspelen*, or dinner plays, during such evenings, in some cases even dressing themselves as peasants to perform their parts.<sup>53</sup> In these instances the relationship between the images framing the space of the dining room and the social activities performed before them should be understood to have closely followed precedents established by the practices of the nobility in their use of tapestry.<sup>54</sup> What is more, by virtue of the variety of pictorial series maintained by Jongelinck at Ter Beke, we might imagine that each defined the particular spaces in which they were displayed for the conduct of different social or intellectual activities – a possibility that would illuminate our understanding of the dramatic differences in style and subject between the works of Floris and Bruegel.<sup>55</sup>

It is perhaps not coincidental that both the *Labors of the Months* and the *Labors of Hercules* were subjects common to fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century tapestries produced for the Burgundian nobility. In fact, one of the most storied tapestry series of the fifteenth century treated the Labors of Hercules, and was written into the several accounts recording the most renowned spectacle of the era, the so-called 'Feast of the Pheasant'.<sup>56</sup> Held at Lille in 1454 and organized at the behest of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, the *Hercules* tapes-

<sup>51</sup> Smith J.C., "The Practical Logistics of Art: Thoughts on the Commissioning, Displaying, and Storing of Art at the Burgundian Court", in Dixon L., (ed.), *In Detail: New Studies of Northern Renaissance Art in Honor of Walter S. Gibson* (Turnhout: 1999) 27–48.

<sup>52</sup> Goldstein, "Artifacts of Domestic Life" 184–185.

<sup>53</sup> Goldstein, "Keeping Up Appearances" 42–48.

<sup>54</sup> These remarks are explored in more detail in Bloom J., "Performance as Paradigm: the Visual Culture of the Burgundian Court", in Borchert T.-H. (ed.), *Staging the Court of Burgundy (1419–1482). A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Turnhout: 2011), forthcoming; and idem, "Animated Bodies: The Performance of Images at the Burgundian Court", forthcoming.

<sup>55</sup> I would like to thank Todd Richardson for offering this especially provocative insight.

<sup>56</sup> Lafortune-Martel A., *Fête noble en Bourgogne au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Montreal: 1984).

tries served as the principal background for a spectacle of staggering ostentation designed to inspire the Burgundian nobility to join Philip in a crusade against the Great Turk. Imbricated as they were in crusader myth, the *Labors of Hercules* not only modeled the conduct expected from the knights of the Golden Fleece, but also exhibited the deeds of one of the celebrated (if putative) forbears from whom the duke himself claimed direct descent. Published in multiple accounts that were broadly disseminated across Europe, the Feast of the Pheasant may well have comprised one of the most enduring legacies of the Burgundian dynasty, ensuring that the cultural practices of the court were closely associated with historical inheritance of the Low Countries.

The resonance of the Burgundian past was palpably felt not only in mid-sixteenth-century Antwerp, but also within the very household at Ter Beke. Jacques Jongelinck, from whom Nicolaes had ordered the *Bacchus* and the *Seven Planets*, had been commissioned by Philip II of Spain to complete the sculptural program for the tomb of his great-great-grandfather, Charles the Bold.<sup>57</sup> Installed at the cathedral of Bruges, the commission was part of a program intended to affirm Philip II's Burgundian inheritance, and to assert thereby the legitimacy of his claims to dominion over the Netherlands. This was also the agenda prompting the extended tour of the Low Countries conducted by Charles V and Philip II in 1549, during which the latter was repeatedly fêted with images that likened Philip to the figure of Hercules and thus linked him to the historical associations between his Burgundian forbears and the Greek hero.<sup>58</sup> Scholars have described the campaign of ritual entries as motivated in part by the attempt to effect the 'Burgundianization' of Prince Philip, who had been born and raised in Spain.<sup>59</sup> Though the term refers to efforts made to familiarize the prince with the protocols and etiquette he would be expected to observe when in the company of the nobility in the Netherlands, it also implicitly

<sup>57</sup> Smolderen L., *Jacques Jonghelinck: Sculpteur, médailleur et graveur de sceaux (1530–1606)*, (Louvain-la-Neuve: 1996). See also Roberts A., "The Chronology and Significance of the Tomb of Mary of Burgundy", *Art Bulletin* 71 (1989) 376–400.

<sup>58</sup> On the program of the triumphal entry, see Meadow M., "Ritual and Civic Identity in Philip II's 1549 Antwerp Blijde Inkomst", *Hof-, Staats- en Stadsceremonies. Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 49 (1998) 37–68.

<sup>59</sup> Peeters E., "1549 Knight's Game at Binche. Constructing Philip II's Ideal Identity in a Ritual of Honor", *Hof-, Staats- en Stadsceremonies. Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 49 (1998) 19–23; Meadow, "Ritual and Civic Identity" 40.

underscores Philip's inherent foreignness. Philip's Burgundianization was thus further intended to encourage the public acceptance of his dynastic inheritance by framing his conduct in terms familiar to the citizens of the Low Countries through their historical relationship with the Burgundian dukes. Viewed in these terms, the cultural legacy of the Burgundian court should be understood to embody an indigenous tradition that was embraced as part of the local history of the region. By extension, while Burgundian practices can be read as aristocratic and thus both elite and international, they also came to signify as native customs that were adopted by an urban patriciate familiar with such behaviors for more than a century.

Philip II was reported to have actually viewed Floris's *Labors of Hercules* at Ter Beke during a stay in Antwerp in 1556. Accepting this account profoundly inflects the interpretation of the series: the presence of Philip II before the monumental cycle of paintings connects their heroic subject to the physical person of the king and to his celebrated descent from the Burgundian dynasty; it also offers a powerful example of the functional parallels between the conventions of tapestry display and the novel character of Jongelinck's installation of paintings at Ter Beke. Though this reading is contingent upon the historical moment of the king's visit, it does not seem implausible to suggest that such an event would have indelibly marked Jongelinck's subsequent understanding of his own paintings. Regardless of Jongelinck's initial motivations in commissioning Floris's series, then, the *Labors of Hercules* would have remained a perpetual physical reminder of Philip II's appearance at Ter Beke and, by extension, of the iconographic significance of its theme to the local dynastic tradition.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, Jongelinck's purchase of Ter Beke itself reflects a similar admixture of humanist and indigenous historical influences. The maintenance of a suburban villa was a practice advocated by Alberti in *De Re Aedificatoria*, and Jongelinck's investment in Ter Beke has generally been understood to demonstrate the influence of Italian models of consumption.<sup>61</sup> Evidence of this assertion is suggested in a poem by

<sup>60</sup> Van de Velde, "Labours of Hercules" 117. Jacques Jongelinck was appointed sculptor and metal founder to Philip II in 1572. It merits mention that after Nicolaes Jongelinck's death, Jacques Jongelinck offered the series to Philip II in repayment of an outstanding debt. His offer of Floris's series was refused (*ibid.*, 122).

<sup>61</sup> Buchanan, "The Collection of Nicolaes Jongelinck: II" 547. Goldstein, "Artifacts of Domestic Life" 184, is more tentative in her estimation of Jongelinck's dependence upon the Italian model.

Domenicus Lampsonius that forms the dedication of the engravings executed by Cornelis Cort after the *Labors of Hercules* series Floris had painted for Jongelinck. Lampsonius heaps praise upon Jongelinck's house at Ter Beke, which he identifies as a paragon of art-loving enterprise that even Italy should strive to emulate.<sup>62</sup> Despite this relatively clear indication of the impact of Renaissance humanist cultural and literary forms on Jongelinck's purchase of Ter Beke, the possession of the property can also be read in terms of the desire to imitate the historical practices of the late-medieval nobility. Jongelinck's *speelhuis* was part of an early modern subdivision just outside the city walls of Antwerp. The grounds of the development had been purchased by Gilbert van Schoonbeke from a local nobleman, Willem van de Werve, Margrave of Ryen, in 1546, and sold in plots of various sizes to prominent Antwerp merchants.<sup>63</sup> Jongelinck's property was one of the largest, and his villa one of the most lavish, including a courtyard, orchard, and grounds. The castle of Van de Werve's former estate was purchased by Jacob van Hencxthoven, a wealthy merchant who acquired the title Heer of Hemiksem.<sup>64</sup> Other merchants known to have bought villas in the subdivision include the brothers Gaspar and Melchior Schetz, who famously purchased the village of Hoboken in 1559 and who were depicted in a painting by Gillis Mostaert being received as lords of the village.<sup>65</sup> The notional interests of such acquisitions seem rooted in the attempt to arrogate the historical privileges of the nobility who, despite the relative neglect of modern scholars, still occupied a central place within the structures of sixteenth-century society.<sup>66</sup> Understanding Jongelinck's purchase of Ter Beke as, at least in part, motivated by the desire to appropriate the cultural forms of the aristocracy frames yet another perspective from which the paintings with which he decorated his house might be viewed. Bruegel's *Labors of the Months*, long associated with the pictorial traditions emerging from the elite medium of manuscript illumination, can also be understood as complements

<sup>62</sup> Buchanan, "The Collection of Niclaes Jongelinck: II" 547.

<sup>63</sup> Van de Velde, "The Labours of Hercules" 117; Buchanan, "The Collection of Niclaes Jongelinck: II" 547. Buchanan gives the date of purchase as 1547. On Van Schoonbeke, see Soly, *Urbanisme en kapitalisme*.

<sup>64</sup> Soly, *Urbanisme en kapitalisme* 333. See also Kavalier, *Pieter Bruegel* 165.

<sup>65</sup> Kavalier, *Pieter Bruegel* 165.

<sup>66</sup> Sullivan, "Aertsen's Kitchen and Market Scenes" 255.

to the seigniorial affectations of wealthy Antwerp merchants.<sup>67</sup> Floris's *Labors of Hercules*, typically read as evocative of the burgeoning local interest in international humanism, at the same time reflects the emulation of patterns of consumption and exhibition that characterized the owners of late Burgundian tapestries.

What makes the efforts of men such as Jongelinck all the more interesting is that their assumption of aristocratic entitlements was accomplished not simply through the acquisition of sufficient wealth to purchase the trappings of the nobility (albeit on a smaller scale); rather, they made use of both classical and contemporary literature on the country house and garden as means to introduce an alternative cultural narrative to authorize their ambitions.<sup>68</sup> In effect, they married the historical practices of the indigenous, late-medieval aristocracy with the intellectual armature of humanist discourse introduced by the spread of Renaissance ideals. The result was a distinctive – indeed, a definitive – visual program that distinguished the urban elite from the traditional aristocracy, whose abuses and excesses were subjected to myriad criticisms; from the encroachments of the middle classes; and from the lower classes, whose impoverishment marked one of the perils of Antwerp's rapid urbanization. The integrated display of paintings that embodied such complex appropriations should thus be understood not simply as varied expressions of particular stylistic preferences, but also as deliberate, communicative acts that articulated a decidedly vernacular function.

#### IV. *The Vernacularity of Easel Painting*

Pieter Bruegel never painted an altarpiece.<sup>69</sup> It is likely that he was the first Netherlandish painter of any account about whom this can be said, and it is a claim of no small consequence. Unlike Floris, who

<sup>67</sup> Silver L., "Pieter Bruegel in the Capital of Capitalism", *Pieter Bruegel. Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 47 (1996) 125–153, 132–133; Kavalier, *Pieter Bruegel* 165; Goldstein, "Artifacts of Domestic Life" 184–185.

<sup>68</sup> Kavalier, *Pieter Bruegel* 165, and 317–318, n. 43–44.

<sup>69</sup> Koerner, "Unmasking the World" 245. Bruegel did work on an altarpiece in Mechelen with Pieter Baltens, who received the principal commission, on which see Monballieu A., "P. Bruegel en het altar van de mechelse handschoenmakers (1551)", *Handelingen van de Koninglike Kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en Kunst van Mechelen* 68 (1964) 92–110.

was a prolific painter of altarpieces and whose wealth and fame were based in no small part thereon, Bruegel trafficked in designs for prints and, more important for the concerns of this essay, in easel paintings. The exceptional character of Bruegel's exclusive attention to easel painting rather than altarpieces submits yet another indication of the comparative novelty of that cultural product, a claim advanced at various points throughout these arguments. The patrons of such works were, by and large, members of a burgeoning constituency that can be broadly described as the merchant middle class. That the advent of the easel picture and the middle class were essentially coincident is a compelling historical observation; it impels an assessment of the relationship between these two developments, and prompts an evaluation of the social function performed by easel paintings in sixteenth-century Flanders.<sup>70</sup> And it is precisely here that a consideration of the vernacular as a critical term holds its richest potential. Understanding the vernacular not as the reflection of an idea (style, for example), but as a communicative act exercised to define a particular community, shifts the basic terms upon which meaning is determined. Analysis of the utility of paintings – of their essential instrumentality, defined through the conditions of their display and the social engagements they precipitate – exposes the multifaceted appropriations embedded in their adaptation to the sixteenth-century Flemish domestic interior. The easel painting might thus be positioned as a novel visual medium harnessed to a broader cultural program that attempted to shape a social identity for the nascent middle class elite, woven from multiple pictorial and cultural traditions. This understanding welds long-standing patterns of cultural appropriation to contemporary discursive interests pursued in the attempt to articulate a discrete, local vernacular.

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<sup>70</sup> This project is elaborated in Bloom J., *The Social Image: The Origins of Easel Painting in Early Modern Flanders* (forthcoming).

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VISUALIZING VITRUVIUS:  
STYLISTIC PLURALISM IN SERLIO'S *SIXTH BOOK ON*  
*ARCHITECTURE*?\*

Eelco Nagelsmit

The complex dynamics of artistic exchange between Italy and the North may be exemplified by the work of the Italian architect and *trattatista* Sebastiano Serlio (1475–ca. 1554). Educated in Rome during the heyday of Bramante and Raphael, and subsequently active in the Venetian circle of Titian and Sansovino, Serlio was a child of the Italian 'High Renaissance'. His influential illustrated publications on architecture have led to his appreciation by architectural historians as a disseminator and populariser of the High Renaissance style beyond the Italian peninsula. Not only did his books travel abroad, but in his old age Serlio moved to France on the invitation of the italphile French king Francis I. Here he worked as architect and continued to publish. Especially in book 6 of his seven-volume treatise, on domestic architecture, Serlio addressed regional differences between architecture, juxtaposing Italian and French versions of the same design.

In this essay, I will analyze text and images of Serlio's book 6, inquiring into his views on vernacular building customs. As he developed these ideas in a foreign country in which he himself acted as an agent of Italian stylistic dissemination, how did this position affect his attitude toward regional differences in architecture?

To answer these questions, I will first introduce the architect and his books, place him in the context of the emerging Renaissance style in France, and discuss the structure and content of his book 6. Next, the main theme of the book will be analyzed: the dialectics between the terms *commodità* and *decoro*. What was the intended audience of the book and what did this audience expect? Finally, I will inquire

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into the relation between Serlio's book on domestic architecture and that of his ancient precursor Vitruvius. I will argue that, despite its frequent deviations from Vitruvian design principles, Serlio's book was based much closer on Vitruvius in spirit and method than has previously been recognized, and that it was especially conceived as complementary to the ancient author's book on domestic architecture. Unlike what the reception of his other books might suggest, in his book on domestic architecture Serlio was not on a mission to spread a universal Italian style. Yet did he instead cultivate vernacular building customs?

### *The architect and his books*

The Bolognese Sebastiano Serlio was educated in the Roman workshop of the painter and architect Baldassare Peruzzi. Like many artists, he moved to Venice after the Sack of Rome (1527), where he joined the circle of Jacopo Sansovino, Titian, and Pietro Aretino.<sup>1</sup> In the Veneto, Serlio was esteemed by patrician *dilettanti* and humanists because he shared his knowledge of ancient and modern Roman architecture (and his collection of architectural drawings) with them.<sup>2</sup> As an architect and designer he received few commissions, yet he did publish his drawings and in 1537 his 'Fourth Book of Architecture', the first in a series of seven books on architecture. With this treatise, Serlio followed the tradition initiated by Leon Battista Alberti in the mid-fifteenth century, aiming to give 'general rules' according to the precepts of the only surviving ancient treatise on architecture, the *Ten Books of Architecture* (*De architectura libri decem*) by Vitruvius. Serlio, however, was the first writer on architecture to fully integrate text and high-quality illustrations.<sup>3</sup> He focused less on theory than his predecessors had, and more on practical examples and design problems, sometimes even defying what Vitruvius advises.

As stated in the introduction to his book 4, Serlio intended to write seven books on architecture, to be published one by one. The first would be on geometry, the second on perspective, the third on Roman

<sup>1</sup> Günther H., "Studien zum Venezianischen Aufenthalt des Sebastiano Serlio", *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* 32 (1981) 42–94.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>3</sup> See Carpo M., *Architecture in the age of printing: orality, writing, typography, and printed images in the history of architectural theory*, tr. Benson S. (Cambridge: 2001).

antiquities, the fourth on 'general rules of the five Orders', the fifth on churches, the sixth on domestic architecture, and the seventh and final book on situations the architect may have to face. According to Hubertus Günther, books 4 and 3 are typical collections of drawings of antique buildings from different sources, which Serlio had hastily put together from Peruzzi's legacy.<sup>4</sup> Both books were published in Venice, the latter under the patronage of King Francis I of France. The French king soon called Serlio to his court at Fontainebleau, where Serlio became *peintre et architecte ordinaire* in 1541 (at the age of 65). Enjoying the protection of the king's sister Marguerite d'Angoulême, Queen of Navarra, and of Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, Serlio had finally achieved his long-time objective: a favourable position at a foreign court.<sup>5</sup>

### *Serlio and the Renaissance in France*

When Serlio moved to France, Renaissance-style ornament had been fashionable in France for several decades. However, like most ultramontane architecture from this period, French buildings were characterized by a fragmentary application of classical motifs to otherwise traditional architecture. Unlike in Italy, where classical remains abounded, the French had little knowledge of classical architecture and were dependant on books, drawings, and occasional travel experiences. Moreover, French building practice was still organized following medieval guild traditions, according to which master masons and noble overseers shared responsibility over the result, whereas in Italy architecture had emerged as a liberal art, practised by learned artists who were fully in charge of the execution of their designs. The Renaissance ideal of unity between the whole and the parts had not yet been adopted by builders and patrons in France, and traditional building practise was not well suited to its realization. Instead, French master masons prided themselves on intricate vaulting, complex staircases, and stereometry, and jealously kept the secrets of their trade.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Günther, "Studien" 44.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed account of Serlio's life and struggle to find royal patronage, see Frommel S., *Sebastiano Serlio, architect* (Milan: 2003) 13–31.

<sup>6</sup> For recent literature on French Renaissance architecture, see Perouse de Montclos J.-M., *L'Architecture à la française: du milieu du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: 2001); Pauwels Y., *L'architecture au temps de la Pléiade* (Paris: 2002); Zerner H., *Renaissance Art in France: The Invention of Classicism* (Paris: 2003).

Nonetheless, a strong interest in the study of Vitruvius had recently emerged in France. The ancient treatise was translated into French and published and commented upon by humanists like Guillaume Philandrier and Jean Martin.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, Francis I had attracted Italian artists like Rosso Fiorentino, Francesco Primaticcio, and Benvenuto Cellini to his court, while the young French architect Philibert Delorme (1514–1570) was sent to Rome from 1533–1536 to measure antique remains.

In the history of French architecture, Serlio has often been regarded as a seminal figure who introduced the Italian conception of architecture in France, soon followed (and overshadowed) by native French champions of Renaissance architecture like Philibert Delorme, Pierre Lescot, and Jacques Androuet du Cerceau, while his books were plagiarized by others like Pieter Coecke van Aelst in Antwerp. Contemporaries acknowledged this debt, for example, the artist Jean Goujon, who illustrated the first French edition of Vitruvius (published by Jean Martin in 1547) and gave due credit to Serlio in his annotation, appended to the book:

And even in our own day we have in this kingdom of France a Messer Sebastiano Serlio, who has with great diligence written about and illustrated many things according to the rules of Vitruvius, and who was the first in the kingdom to shed light on these doctrines.<sup>8</sup>

A similar statement stressing Serlio's importance as 'teacher' is found in Delorme, who wrote in his own book on architecture (1567):

It is [Serlio], who first gave the French by his books and drawings the knowledge of ancient buildings, and of several very good inventions, being a worthy man, as I knew him, and of a very good spirit, to publish and give of his own goodwill what he had measured, seen and taken from the works of antiquity.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Guillaume Philandrier, *In decem libros M. Vitruvii Pollionis de architectura annotationes* (Rome: 1544; Paris: 1545); Jean Martin, *Architecture ou Art de bien bastir, de Marc Vitruve Pollion, auteur romain antique, Mis de latin en francoys, par Ian Martin* (Paris: 1547).

<sup>8</sup> Jean Goujon, "Ian Goujon studieux d'architecture aux lecteurs, salut", in Jean Martin, *Architecture*, fol. Diii: 'Et encores pour ce iourd'huy avons nous en ce royaume de France un messire Sebastian Serlio, lequel a assez diligemment escrit et figuré beaucoup de choses selon les règles de Vitruve, et a esté le commencement de mettre teles doctrines en lumière au Royaume'.

<sup>9</sup> Philibert Delorme, *Le premier tome de l'Architecture* (Paris: 1567) 202v: 'C'est luy [Serlio] qui a donné le premier aux François, par ses livres et desseins la cognoissance

Though Delorme praises Serlio as disseminator of knowledge of antique buildings and of 'several very good inventions' (probably meaning those of Bramante) his praise does not seem to pertain to Serlio's own designs. This may be indicative of the mixed reception Serlio got in France. Serlio's advices were less sought after in France than he might have hoped; notwithstanding the success of his publications, and despite his position as court architect, he was not awarded any prestigious royal commissions.

Nevertheless, books 1 and 2 of his treatise were published under royal patronage and book 5 under patronage of Marguerite d'Angoulême. Meanwhile, Serlio also worked as an architect for several important patrons at the French court (his most notable commissions were the mansion Grand Ferrare at Fontainebleau and the castle of Ancy-le-Franc). Yet his wish to publish the remaining books 6 and 7 was probably cut short by the death of King Francis I in 1547. After the death of this Italophile king, many Italian artists at the French court fell into disgrace due to the more 'chauvinist' climate under his successor, Henry II.<sup>10</sup> Serlio was replaced in his function as *architecte du roi* in 1548 by the Frenchman Delorme. Serlio moved to Lyon, where he hoped to publish the unpublished books 6 and 7 of his treatise and two additional books: a series of gate designs, the 'Libro Extraordinario', and a book on ancient military camps, 'Castrametation of the Romans'. Only the book of gate designs was published by Jean de Tournes in 1551. Lacking a patron to support the publishing of the other books and fearing he would not be able to publish them in his lifetime, Serlio sold the manuscripts and printing blocks of his books 6 and 7, as well as the book on Roman military camps, to the visiting antiquary Jacopo Strada.<sup>11</sup> Only in 1575, some twenty years after Serlio's death, Strada would publish book 7. So eventually all of Serlio's initial seven books were printed, except book 6, on domestic architecture (*Delle abitazioni*), which is primarily under consideration here.

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des edifices antiques et de plusieurs fort belles inventions estant homme de bien, ainsi que je l'ay cognue, et de fort bonne ame, pour avoir publié et donné de bon cuer, ce qu'il avoit mesuré, vue et retiré des antiquitez'.

<sup>10</sup> Frommel, *Sebastiano Serlio* 13–42 and especially 349–365.

<sup>11</sup> Deswarte-Rosa S., "Le traité d'architecture de Sebastiano Serlio, l'oeuvre d'une vie", in Deswarte-Rosa S. (ed.), *Sebastiano Serlio à Lyon. Architecture et Imprimerie; Le Traité d'Architecture de Sebastiano Serlio: Une Grande Entreprise Editoriale au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Lyon: 2004) vol. 1, 32.

In France Serlio was finally given the chance to work as an architect and realize some of his designs. However, his move to France must have turned out to be somewhat disillusioning, especially after he lost his position at court. In a letter to his patron François de Dinteville, Bishop of Auxerre, he complains:

in truth, I accuse myself of being a poor foreigner in an alien land where there is no place for my art, and where I would rather be a mediocre tailor, or a cobbler, for at least I could then maintain myself better with the sweat of my brow than I do in this Babylonian city [Lyons], with such noble art of patience.<sup>12</sup>

On occasion, the lack of appreciation he received in France also shines through in his treatise. As an expert in the remains of antiquity, Serlio distinguished between architecture by 'knowledgeable' architects who had studied 'worthy architecture' (great examples from antiquity and the present), and those (e.g., artisans, masons) who had not. An illustration of this attitude can be found in book 7, where Serlio discusses the king's new ballroom at Fontainebleau. With disdain, Serlio notes he 'could not say [...] of what Order this architecture was built'.<sup>13</sup> In a passage from the Vienna MS of the book, censored in the final publication, he relates how this could only be the work of a 'French stonemason [Gilles le Breton] who had not only never been outside France but who had never gone very far beyond the area surrounding these parts [of Fontainebleau]'.<sup>14</sup> When the project was halfway, a 'man of authority and better judgement' (Philibert Delorme) took over, but Serlio complains how he, pensioner of the king and royal architect, 'was not even asked for the smallest piece of advice'.<sup>15</sup> He continues by giving the design he would have made had he been asked to, leaving future generations to decide which design is superior.

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<sup>12</sup> Letter of 20 May 1552: 'nel vero io mi acuso povero forestiero imparte aliena dove non ha luogo questa mia arte: ci nel qual luogo amarei meglio di essere uno mediocre sartore o un calzolaio che al meno col sudore del mio volto io potrei trattenermi meglio che non faccio in questa babilonica cita, con cosi nobile arte patientia' [reproduced and transcribed in Frommel, *Sebastiano Serlio* 32–38].

<sup>13</sup> Hart V. – Hicks P., *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* II (New Haven-London: 1996) 256 [Serlio, book 7, 96].

<sup>14</sup> Hart – Hicks, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* II, 623–624 (Serlio, book 7, Vienna MS, fol. 13r [transcribed in Fiore, F.P., *Architettura civile: libri sesto, settimo e ottavo nei manoscritti di Monaco e Vienna* (Milan: 1994) 332]: 'di quella architettura chi puote avere un muratore francese non mai ussito non solamente della Franza, ma poco alontanatosi da questi circonvicini paesi').

<sup>15</sup> Hart – Hicks, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* II, 256 (Serlio, book 7, 96).

Alas, the significance of Serlio's work is still disputed up to today. Architectural historians tend to view Serlio as a marginal figure in the history of architecture, as his designs are not perceived as ground-breaking milestones in its development. Günther sees Serlio primarily as a drafter,<sup>16</sup> whereas Sabine Frommel emphasizes the significance of his architectural realizations in France.<sup>17</sup> His treatise has often been regarded as a handbook or pattern-book for common artisans. Yet its importance in the formation of the canon of the Orders, and in promoting the worldwide dissemination of the Renaissance style, is widely recognized. As pointed out by Onians, in their time, Serlio's publications were exceptionally often translated and reedited (especially book 4).<sup>18</sup> Onians counters the argument that purchasers were supposedly only interested in the illustrations and rejects the modern view on Serlio's treatise as a handbook.<sup>19</sup> Like most of his fellow *trattatisti*, Serlio (and many of his readers) were hardly interested in the practical side of building: his books focus on building typologies and problems of design and decoration. Christof Thoenes points out how Serlio's discussion of architecture in terms of its conformity to the 'rules' and to the current social norms transforms architecture into a general cultural phenomenon. Serlio thus passes on the capacity of architectural criticism, or *giudizio*, beyond those concerned with building (architects and patrons) to a wider public.<sup>20</sup> Yet there is more to this than just the vulgarization of architectural criticism: Serlio has a very clear purpose of teaching his readers how to visualize a piece of architecture prior to its actual realization. This is also emphasized by Onians, who claims that the structure of Serlio's treatise, in which the first two books on geometry and perspective replace the usual books on materials, sites, etc., suggest that 'an architect is engaged in constructing not a building, but a visual relationship to a building'.<sup>21</sup>

Evaluating Serlio's objectives and achievements in this light prompts a reconsideration of Serlio's role as the apostle of the Renaissance style for which he is often held. Rather, the *professore d'architettura* wanted

<sup>16</sup> Günther "Studien", 75.

<sup>17</sup> Frommel, *Sebastiano Serlio*, passim.

<sup>18</sup> Onians J., "Serlio and the History of Architecture", in *Art, culture and nature: from art history to world art studies* (London: 2006) 360.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>20</sup> Thoenes C., "Architecture de la Renaissance", in Deswarte-Rosa S. (ed.), *Sebastiano Serlio à Lyon* (Lyon: 2004) 26–27.

<sup>21</sup> Onians, "Serlio and the History of Architecture" 371.



to enable architects, patrons, and construction workers to communicate more efficiently and accurately by teaching them a common language of drawing. This objective is stated clearly by Serlio in the introduction to book 6, in which he also draws on regional diversity:

I will however say that because the regions of the earth differ in air, water and terrain, an architect who has arrived in a place which he has not seen before should seek the counsel of those who were born in that region and who have grown old there, particularly those who are knowledgeable in these matters. On the other hand, as regards the laying-out of a well-conceived and proportioned building with the commodity in harmony with the decorum, all those who have not studied worthy architecture over many years and who are unable to draw, that is design, should give way to those who can provide a good account of these matters. But O God in heaven, how many there are who put on the mantle of this beautiful and noble art but who in this respect are blinder than moles!<sup>22</sup>

In this passage Serlio unambiguously expresses his resentment toward (French) architects who are not sufficiently trained to properly draw and design (that is to visualize) their projects in advance. He does not attack the use of outdated or traditional 'foreign' or 'Gothic' styles, but the incapacity of those concerned with building to convey their ideas clearly and rationally in drawings.

As Serlio had explicated in his first four books, the crucial means to achieve this ability were geometry (book 1) and perspective (book 2) in addition to knowledge of classical architecture (book 3) and of Vitruvius's writings (book 4). In his fifth book Serlio proposes a series of moderately sized church designs that 'in our times can be completed', as opposed to the overambitious (Gothic) churches of his ancestors, thus once more stressing the importance of well thought-out design and control over its execution, as opposed to an 'organic' concep-

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<sup>22</sup> Hart – Hicks, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* II, 3 (MMS, fol. 1r): 'Ma dirò bene che per essere diversi paesi sotto il cielo, di aria, di acque et di terreni, che un architetto, giunti di nuovo in un luogo da lui non più veduto, è ben ragione ch'ei se riporti al parer di coloro che nel ditto paese sono nati e invecchiati, e massimamente quegli che di tal cose hanno cognizione. Ma quanto alla disposizione di uno edificio bene inteso et proporzionato, et che sia accompagnato la commodità et il decoro insieme, tutti coloro che non hano longamente ben studiato la buona architettura et che son privi della grafida, cioè del disegno, deonno cedere a coloro che ne sano render buon conto. Ma, oh Dio immortale, quanti si vestono di questa bella et nobile arte, li quali sono in essa più ciechi che talpe!'

tion of a building process spanning several architects' lives.<sup>23</sup> In the subsequent books on domestic architecture (book 6) and situations (book 7), Serlio continues to elaborate this program by showing how he would approach both the requirements of real and fictive building programs, thus setting examples for both architects and patrons.

### *The structure and content of book 6*

Two of Serlio's preparatory manuscripts for book 6 have come down to us, one in the Avery Architectural Library of Columbia University in New York and the other in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich.<sup>24</sup> A set of printing proofs of the woodcuts are kept in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna.<sup>25</sup>

The two manuscript versions differ considerably. Scholars agree that the Columbia MS was a preparatory sketchbook, most of which was created in France during the last years of Francis's reign, between ca. 1537 and 1546 (but largely completed before 1544). When the king died in 1547, Serlio produced a second version, the Munich MS, adapting sections of the book to the new king Henry II (and possibly also to the new, chauvinist political climate) around 1547/48.<sup>26</sup> At this occasion, Serlio edited out some of the more controversial features, such as 'licentious' use of the orders.<sup>27</sup> This manuscript must have been used as a presentation copy.<sup>28</sup> The surviving printing proofs of the woodcuts do

<sup>23</sup> See Serlio's remarks on French gothic cathedrals (in Serlio's words 'German work') in his book 5 (Hart – Hicks, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* I, 426).

<sup>24</sup> The manuscripts were first described by Du Colombier P. – D'Espezel P., "Le sixième livre retrouvé de Serlio et l'architecture française de la renaissance", *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 12 (1934) 42–59, and Dinsmoor H.B., "The literary remains of Sebastiano Serlio", *The art bulletin* 24, 1–2 (1942) 55–91 (part 1), 115–154 (part 2). Facsimiles were published by Rosci M. – Brizio A.M., *Il Trattato di architettura di Sebastiano Serlio*, 2 vols. (Milan: 1966–1967) and Rosenfeld M.N. et al., *Sebastiano Serlio: On Domestic Architecture* (New York: 1978).

<sup>25</sup> The printing proofs of the woodcuts are published in Fiore F.P., *Architettura civile* (Milan: 1994). See also Rosenfeld, "Le dialogue de Serlio avec ses lecteurs et mécènes en France. Hypothèse sur la non publication du *Sesto Libro*", in Deswarte-Rosa S. (ed.), *Sebastiano Serlio à Lyon. Architecture et imprimerie*, vol. 1 (Lyon: 2004) 152–162.

<sup>26</sup> Frommel, *Sebastiano Serlio* 353–355.

<sup>27</sup> Rosenfeld, *On Domestic Architecture* 60–65.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

not correspond exactly to drawings in either of the two manuscripts, suggesting there was a third, final version as well. Though neither version of book 6 was ever printed during the early modern period, the manuscripts seem to have circulated in French architectural circles.<sup>29</sup> Several architects were influenced by Serlio's designs from the book. The general concept of a book on house designs was emulated by architects throughout the Early Modern Period.

In both manuscripts Serlio's book 6 consists of two parts, the first part dealing with 'the habitations outside cities, of all ranks of men', and the second part with houses in the city. In the course of the book, the designs evolve gradually from peasant hut to royal palace. Both parts of the book are divided into a series of projects (respectively 32 and 22). Each project is illustrated by means of plans and elevations (executed as woodcuts) facing the pages reserved for textual explanation, which was originally intended to be bilingual (Italian and French). The smaller projects are put together on one set of pages while some larger projects require more than one set of pages.

In the first part (on the countryside) Serlio distinguishes the following classes of patrons for his country houses: the peasant (poor, middle ranking, and rich), the poor craftsman, the merchant or citizen (poor and richer), the gentleman, the *condottiero*, the illustrious prince, the exceedingly illustrious prince, and the tyrant prince. For most of these cases Serlio gives several alternative designs. Finally, he comes to deal with royal commissions, distinguishing between a series of small lodgings (*loggianti*) for the pleasure of the king and his inner circle on the one hand, and palaces where the entire court can be accommodated on the other.

The second part of the book (on city houses) is organised along a similar scale. First Serlio shows some houses for craftsmen (divided into poor, 'high ranking', and 'comfortably wealthy'), proceeding with merchants and rich citizens, noble gentlemen, the *condottiero*, the praetor or *podestà*, the governor or *luogotenente*, the exceedingly illustrious prince, and finally the city's royal palace.

The book concludes with a 'Discourse on several Matters omitted for Brevity's sake', in which Serlio apologizes for his 'licences' regarding

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<sup>29</sup> Jacques Androuet du Cerceau possessed the Columbia MS at some point and added French titles to some of its designs. See Rosenfeld, "Le dialogue" 159.

the Vitruvian rules.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the book contains many transgressions of the style we may expect from an Italian architect of the first half of the sixteenth century. One of the most remarkable aspects of the book is that in several instances two alternative designs for the same situation are proposed: an Italian [Fig. 1] and French [Fig. 2] version side by side. Serlio actually propagates houses in a French style and presents them on a par with Italian style architecture. When, in the course of the book, houses for ever higher social classes are discussed, Serlio increasingly comes to integrate the two building traditions in designs that were supposed to be universally applicable.

The question as to what Serlio exactly tries to convey by means of this juxtaposition of vernacular custom, sometimes interpreted as eclecticism or 'stylistic relativism', has given rise to diverging scholarly opinions.<sup>31</sup> Still, its motivations have not yet been convincingly explained.<sup>32</sup> To understand the apparent dilemma of a universal

<sup>30</sup> According to Serlio, the lack of space resulted from the projected division of the text pages into an Italian and a French half (MMS, fol. 74r–v).

<sup>31</sup> Since the rediscovery of the manuscripts of book 6 in the 1920s, scholarship has concentrated on Serlio's stylistic development and on his housing typology. Considerable attention has also been paid to his social classification of houses: the idea of giving an overview of housing examples fitted to every class of society, including the poor, was unprecedented in Serlio's time, as most other writers on architecture only dealt with major buildings. This has caused some modern scholars to see in Serlio an enlightened idealist (see for instance Carpo M., "The architectural principles of temperate classicism. Merchant dwellings in Sebastiano Serlio's Sixth Book", *Res* 22 [1992] 135–151), whereas others were struck by his lack of idealism by, for example, providing examples of a palace for a 'tyrant prince' (see Hart V., "'Of little or even no importance to the architect': on absent ideals in Serlio's drawings in the Sixth book, on domestic architecture", in Palmer, R. – Frangenberg, Th. (eds.), *The rise of the image: essays on the history of the illustrated art book* [Aldershot: 2003] 87–104). According to Frommel, the structure of book 6 reflects the rigid hierarchy of the social structure of absolutist France (Frommel, *Sebastiano Serlio* 352). The only class that is not included in Serlio's hierarchical scale of dwellings is the clergy, probably to avoid sectarianism (Hart – Hicks, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* II, xxvii), but as Carpo argues, possibly because Serlio might have had Protestant leanings (see Carpo M., *Architecture in the age of printing: orality, writing, typography and printed images in the history of architectural theory* [Cambridge MA: 2001] 71–78).

<sup>32</sup> Rosenfeld is convinced as to Serlio's 'acceptance of the local idiom of medieval French domestic architecture on the same level as Italian and Roman architecture' (Rosenfeld, *On Domestic Architecture* 66). According to her, the separation of the two styles was based on the notion of their purity (ibid. 67). She finds it remarkable that Serlio, unlike Vasari, did not condemn Gothic architecture (Rosenfeld M.N., "Sebastiano Serlio's Late Style in the Avery Library Version of the Sixth Book on Domestic Architecture", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 28 [1969] 156). This is contested by Frommel, who holds that Serlio has actually been trying to dissuade the French from their Gothic habits (Frommel, *Sebastiano Serlio* 353). According to

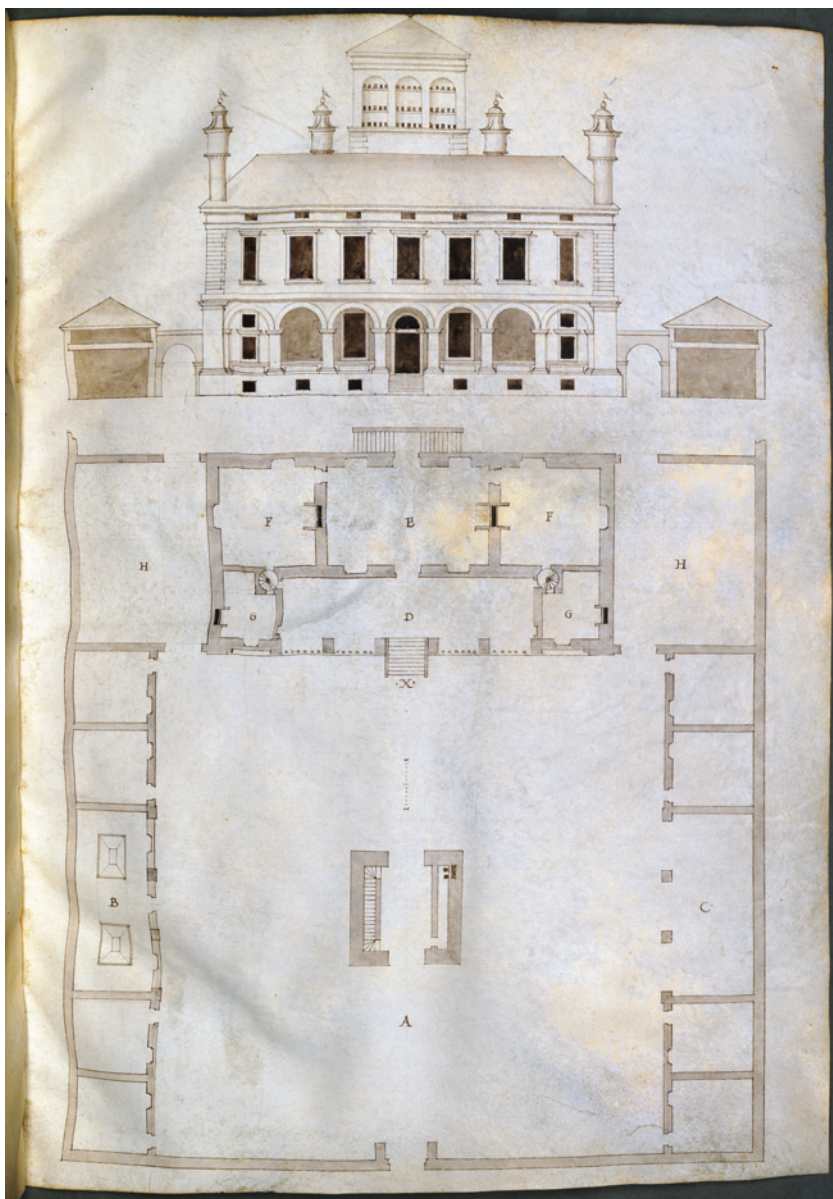


Fig. 1. Sebastiano Serlio, design for an Italian country house (ca. 1547–1548).  
Drawing, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Icon. 189, fol. 7r



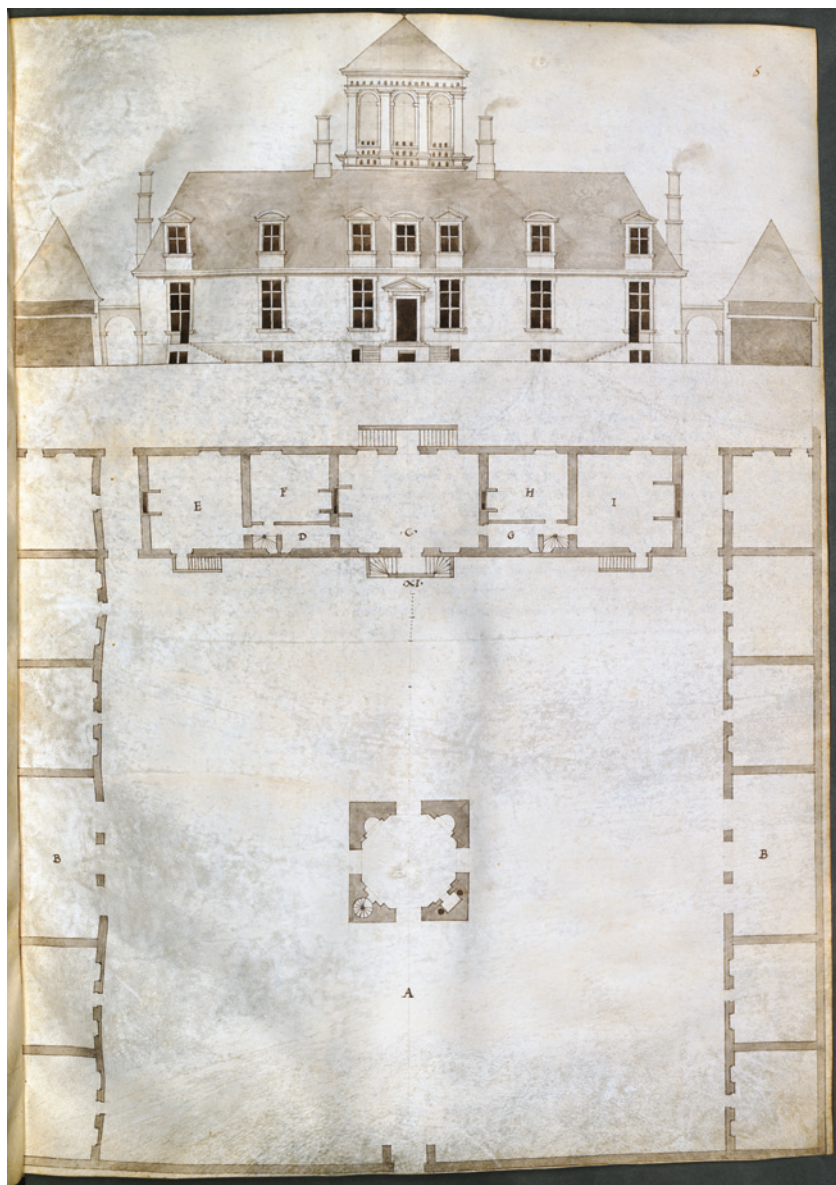


Fig. 2. Sebastiano Serlio, design for a French country house (ca. 1547–1548). Drawing, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Icon. 189, fol. 8r

classicism alongside (or mixed with) vernacular customs, I will inquire into the origins of Serlio's ideas in book 6.

### *Commodità vs. Decoro*

Before his departure for France, Serlio had already witnessed a fair amount of regional diversity between the various states of Italy. He had treated some of the peculiarities of local Venetian architecture in his first publication, book 4 (written and published in Venice in 1537), yet the juxtaposition of two alternative solutions to the same architectural problem is a novelty in book 6. In the first part of the book, on country houses, Serlio limits his 'French alternatives' to houses of craftsmen and merchants. In the second part, on city houses, he gives examples of 'French' houses for craftsmen, merchants, and rich citizens.<sup>33</sup> But when he arrives to discuss the designs for noblemen, Serlio departs from successively giving Italian and French alternatives. Instead, he starts with showing a 'typical Venetian' palace, specifying how local custom in this city deviates from mainland Italy. He then proceeds with two of his designs that were actually executed in France, the Grand Ferrare for Cardinal Ippolito d'Este in Fontainebleau and the castle of Ancy-le-Franc for the Duke of Clermont-Tonnère. These two palaces are presented as integration of the Italian and French 'styles': observing the *decoro antico* while making use of some French *commod-*

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Hart, 'The illustration of alternative models for the same project in Book 6 serves to underline the importance of the architect's creative judgement as opposed to a dependence on absolute rules.' (Hart, "Of little or even no importance" 92–93). See also Du Colombier P., "Sebastiano Serlio en France", *Études d'art* 2 (1946) 31–50; Huber M.R., "Sebastiano Serlio: sur une architecture civile 'alla parisiana'; ses idées sur le gusto francese e italiano, sa contribution à l'évolution vers le classicisme français", *L'Information d'histoire de l'Art* 10 (1965) 9–17; Chastel A., "Serlio en France", in Benedetti S. – Miarelli Mariani G. (eds.), *Quaderni dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Architettura, Saggi in Onore di Guglielmo de Angelis d'Ossat* (Rome: 1987) 321–22; Gloton J.J., "Le traité de Serlio et son influence en France", in Guillaume J. (ed.), *Les traités d'architecture de la Renaissance* (Paris: 1988) 407–423; Guillaume J., "Serlio et l'architecture française", in Thoenes C. (ed.), *Sebastiano Serlio* (Milan: 1989) 67–78.

<sup>33</sup> See Carpo, "The architectural principles" 135–151; and Frommel S., "De la 'casa del povero contadino' à la 'casa del ricco cittadino': maisons rurales et maisons des champs dans le Sixième Livre de Sebastiano Serlio", in Chatenet M. (ed.), *Maisons des champs dans l'Europe de la Renaissance: actes des premières Rencontres d'architecture européenne, Château de Maisons, 10–13 juin 2003*, *De architectura* 11 (Paris: 2006) 49–68.



ità (commodities, conveniences, or customs).<sup>34</sup> The entire discourse of Serlio's book 6 centres on these two opposing notions of *commodità* and *decoro*. In the introduction, Serlio formulates the primary goal of the book: 'I shall deal with, in writing and in visible design, commodity and decorum in harmony [*insieme acordati*], making much use of the commodities of France which I have found really excellent'.<sup>35</sup> In a similar statement on one of the first pages, Serlio explains that he will give an example of a house *alla francese*: 'Since I intend in the course of my book to harmonise [*compagnare*] Italian custom and ornament with the *commodità* of France'.<sup>36</sup> Apparently Serlio sees a dialectical relationship between the notions of *decoro*, or *costume et ornamento italiano*, and the *commodità* [*di Franza*], and confronting this dialectics is the main theme of his book 6. What do these terms signify, where do they come from, and why are they opposed in the treatise?

The term *decorum* is a rhetorical principle concerning the definition of appropriateness, fittingness, or propriety in a given situation (or speech). Though decorum is not quite synonymous to the Vitruvian principle of *decor*, which may denote ornamentation, propriety, and consistency or coherence in architecture, Renaissance writers on architecture nevertheless closely related these two terms.<sup>37</sup> Serlio equally uses *decoro* mostly to denote (Italian or ancient) custom and ornament, in the sense of a scheme of decoration and proportioning that, to a greater or lesser degree, may be applied to a building.

Serlio's term *commodità* has no Vitruvian precedent as an architectural term, though Alberti uses it to denote convenience, and it has often been linked to Vitruvius's *utilitas*, or functionality (from the

<sup>34</sup> See Frommel, "Serlio à Ancy-le-Franc: Vivre 'à l'italienne' dans un château français", *Bulletin de la Classe des Beaux-Arts, Académie Royale de Belgique*, 6 série 11 (2000) 89–118.

<sup>35</sup> Hart – Hicks, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* II, 3 (MMS, fol. 1r): 'dico che in questo mio sesto libro io tratterò in scrittura et in aparente disegno della commodità et del decoro insieme acordati, servendomi assai delle commodità di Franza, le quali veramente ho trovato buone'.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 6 (MMS, fol. 3v): 'Perché nel mio procedere io intendo di *compagnare* la *commodità francese col costume italiano*' (Ibid., 515, n. 33: Serlio omitted the words 'and ornament' in the Munich version, which might suggest that he wanted to be more diplomatic toward the French.)

<sup>37</sup> See Payne A.A., *The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance: Architectural Invention, Ornament and Literary Culture* (Cambridge: 1999) 52–69.

Vitruvian triad *firmitas-utilitas-venustas*).<sup>38</sup> Serlio's *commodità* has been translated as 'convenience' and as '(modern) comfort' and even as 'habitability'.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, his use of the word indicates that it denotes a way of living (and hence building) that is firmly tied to place and custom.<sup>40</sup>

What exactly do these French customs consist of in his treatise, and how do these differ from the Italian customs? In the Columbia MS, Serlio speaks of French houses as 'different from ours', for example in the area around Fontainebleau, 'where they customarily build a stretch of apartments lengthwise'.<sup>41</sup> The drawings of book 6 clearly illustrate such differences [see Figs. 1 and 2]. Some of the most conspicuous features of the houses *al costume di Franza* are: high, pointed roofs (made habitable by dormer-windows) as well as (in the city) pointed gables toward the street, a longitudinal alignment of rooms, closed *galleries* instead of open *loggie*, the use of *vestibules* and *antichambres*, spiral staircases, high windows, low ceilings (for the rooms to be more easily heated), lateral stairways instead of frontal steps to reach the entrance, and tall, rectangular chimneys (instead of the cylindrical ones customary in Italy).

Serlio makes visible how local traditions differ, apparently without giving value judgments: the variants are presented emphatically as mutually exchangeable alternatives, according to the region where one has to build. Yet it has been pointed out that Serlio's 'French' designs have little rapport with the actual French architecture of the time and should not be considered as realistic depictions but as adaptations or interpretations of houses he could have seen in France.<sup>42</sup> The designs

<sup>38</sup> Rosci – Brizio, *Il Trattato* 1. Though the word *commodità* has no Vitruvian precedent, Rosci interprets Serlio's use of the terms *commodità* and *decorum* as related to Vitruvius' triad *firmitas* (firmity of construction), *utilitas* (utility), and *venustas* (beauty). Noting how Serlio consequently avoids discussing construction, he interprets Serlio's *commodità* as a synonym for the Vitruvian *utilitas*, and *decorum* for *venustas*.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 60: 'Il senso di umana funzionalità, di "abitabilità" della casa settentrionale, anche minima, fu compreso dal Serlio in un sol termine: la "commodità".'

<sup>40</sup> I would like to thank Joost Keizer for this observation.

<sup>41</sup> CMS, fol. IV, 1, 9: 'Altro modo di habitazioni costumani li francesi differenti dalli nostri, non di meno le medesime commodità, o, circa, [...] in questi paesi fuori della città è massimamente in questi lochi circonvicini a Fontanableo costumano una tirata di appartamenti in longitudine'. (In MMS this passage is edited out.)

<sup>42</sup> Guillaume J., "Serlio et l'architecture française" in Thoenes C. (ed.), *Sebastiano Serlio* (Milan: 1989) 76. This leads Guillaume to conclude: 'La confrontation des deux manières de bâtir, suivie de leur confusion, aboutit à un échec: s'il avaient été publiés,

seem 'idealized' or 'corrected' versions of the vernacular, for instance by omitting the customary pilasters along the windows, regularizing the ornamentation of the *lucarnes*, and by making the plan more symmetrical. Thus, his 'French' designs are examples of how Serlio would advise to build certain types of houses in France, an attitude reflecting his self-proclaimed role as *professore* in architecture.

In a country other than France, Serlio would have adopted other customs. With regard to ornamentation he suggests that the houses of the lower- and middle classes could be 'customized' according to the region: 'Houses of this sort could serve all countries, by making use of the ornaments which are the custom in the respective country'.<sup>43</sup> This does not mean that he sanctions 'Gothic' ornament, but that ornament could be free of judgment as long as it concerned houses for lower classes. Ornamentation was thus closely related to class, and classical ornament was highly connotative of nobility. His houses for the common classes are obviously less constrained by the *decoro antico*, yet, as Frommel points out, the use of vernacular customs and the absence of classical ornament in Serlio's books cannot be equated with a Gothic style.<sup>44</sup> Only in his book 7, on situations, Serlio treats (existing) Gothic houses, demonstrating how their old-fashioned façades can be modernized by making them appear symmetrical and replacing pointed arches with rectangular windows.<sup>45</sup> As opposed to these 'bad examples' from the past, all of Serlio's designs (including those for poor peasants) conform to certain basic rules of symmetry and proportion.

When Serlio, as his discussion of houses moves up the social ladder through the course of his book, arrives at noble dwellings, he departs from giving French alternatives. Apparently such palaces are required

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les "projets" du Livre VI n'auraient pu servir à personne, ni en France ni en Italie'. See also Forster K.W., "Back to the Farm. Vernacular Architecture and the Development of the Renaissance Villa", *Architectura: Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Baukunst* 4 (1974) 1–12; and Humbert M., "Serlio: il Sesto Libro e l'architettura borghese in Francia", *Storia dell'Arte* 43 (1981) 199–240.

<sup>43</sup> CMS, fol. XLVIII: 'le quai case potranno servire a tutti li paesi: servendosi di quegli ornamento che nei paesi si costumano'. On the same page we find a similar statement: 'e ben che le case qui a dietro dominstrano in apparenza alla italiana: nondimeno elle potranno servire in tutti li paesi'. (This passage was omitted in the later MMS.)

<sup>44</sup> Frommel, *Sebastiano Serlio* 353.

<sup>45</sup> Hart – Hicks, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* II, 310–311 (Serlio, book 7, 156–157). See also Cevese R., "La 'riformazione' delle case vecchie secondo Sebastiano Serlio", in Thoenes, C. (ed.), *Sebastiano Serlio* (Milan: 1989) 196–202; and Frommel, S., "Ristauramenti e restituzioni di case: le idee e i metodi di Sebastiano Serlio tra Italia e Francia", in *Tra storia e restauro: in Francia e in Italia* (Rome: 2007) 6–37.

to adhere more strictly to the classical formula, though he continues to use individual French features. We can see the mechanisms of Serlio's rhetoric at work in the first two designs he gives for a nobleman's house in the city. The first palazzo is described as following the custom of Venice [Fig. 3]. The next project [Fig. 4] is an improvement of the first, replacing the typically Venetian central hallway with a courtyard, because 'I would argue that any house, however grand and opulent it may be, which in the centre does not have a courtyard with surrounding loggias, could never be called the house of a nobleman but merely that of a private gentleman'.<sup>46</sup> Thus Serlio acknowledges the local Venetian custom of planning by incorporating it in his book, but subtly rejects it by giving an example of what he would advise instead. The third example [Fig. 5] is a variation again, illustrating that 'the majority of cities in Italy have another style [*modo*] of building which is very different from that in Venice; this is particularly true of the houses of gentlemen of high rank'.<sup>47</sup> The design of this mainland Italian house:

could be used in any country for a noble gentleman, or for any other person who had the power combined with the desire. [...] This house, with respect to the decorum, was built in the Italian style [*al costume di Italia*], but as for the commodities, in many parts I observed French custom [in the Columbia MS Serlio adds: 'but mixed with the antique'].<sup>48</sup>

Thus, although such customs are bound to a particular region or climate, this does not preclude their potential use outside their place of origin. Serlio is eager to inform his readers about 'commodities' that may be of interest to a wider audience. He recommends dormer windows both for their utility and 'because they are in fact a great

<sup>46</sup> Hart – Hicks, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* II, 110 (MMS, fol. 53v): 'prot-estando che una casa, per grande et ricca ch'ella sia, non avendo nel mezzo una corte con le loggie intorno, io non la chiamarò giamai casa di un nobile, ma di privato gentiluomo'.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 114 (MMS, fol. 55v): 'La maggior parte delle città de Italia tengono un altro modo di fabricare molto defferente da costume di Vinezia, et massimamente i gentiluomini di buon grado'.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 116 (MMS, fol. 56v): 'La pianta qui a dietro dimostrata potrà servire a tutti li paesi per un gentiluomo nobile o a qualunque altro personaggio lo quale abbia il potere et il volere insieme, che poi quanto al sapere, s'el sarà prudente, egli si deve riportare al buon architetto; questa casa, quanto al decoro è fatta al costume di Italia, ma circa alle commodità, io ho in molte parti osservato lo costume francese'.

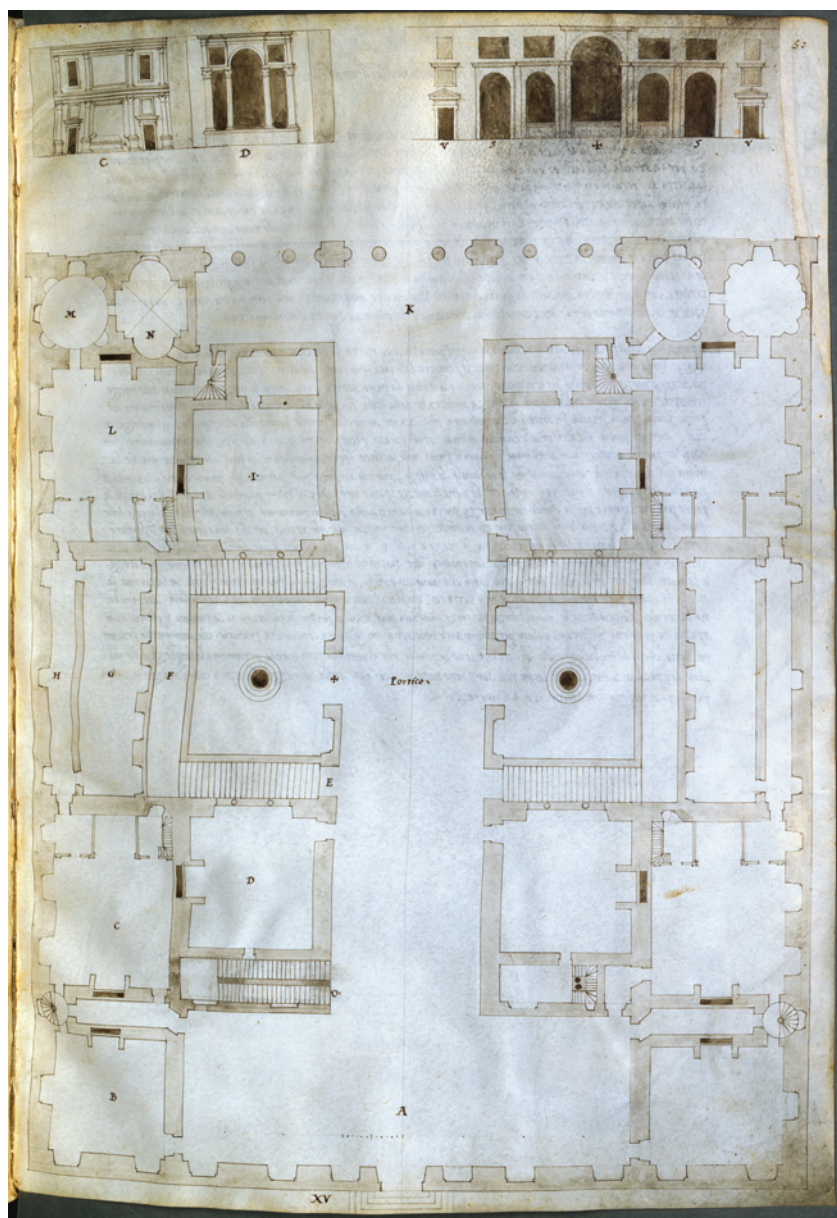


Fig. 3. Sebastiano Serlio, groundplan of a city palace in the Venetian custom (ca. 1547–1548). Drawing, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Icon. 189, fol. 52r



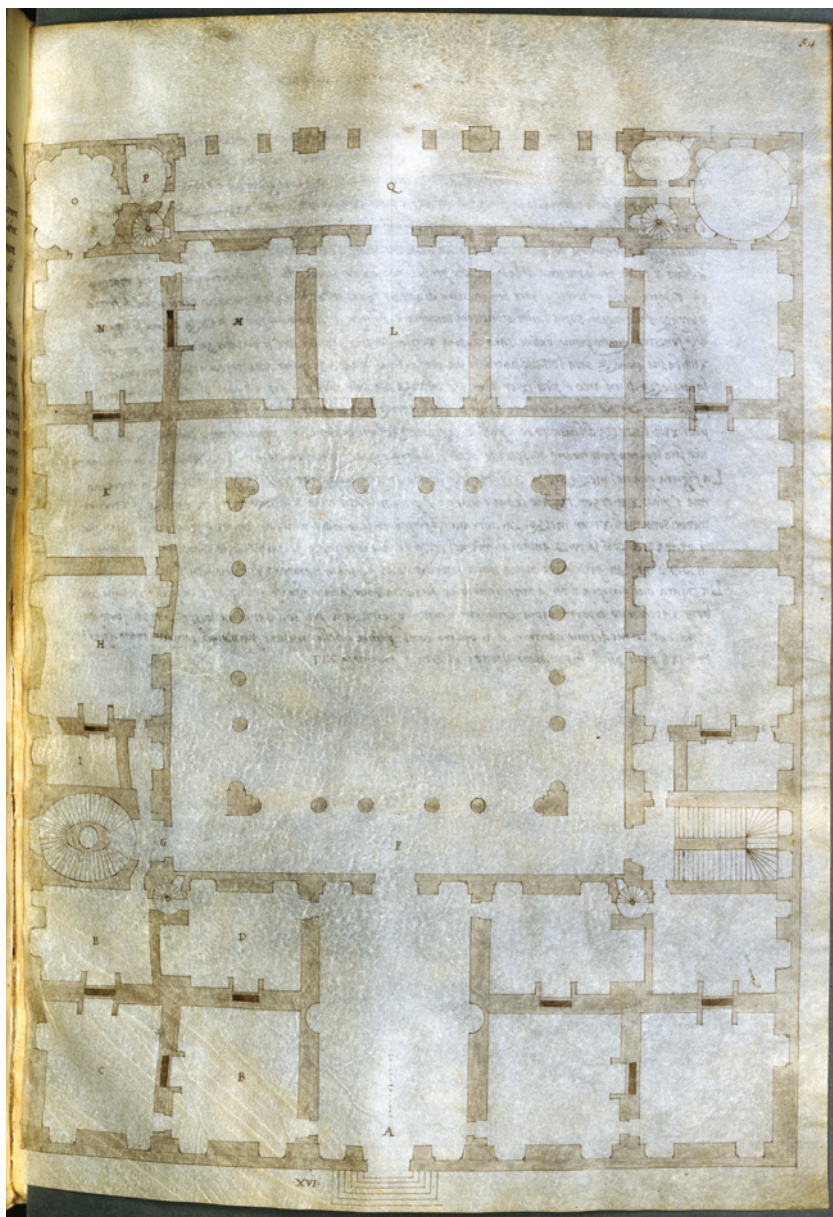


Fig. 4. Sebastiano Serlio, improved groundplan of a city palace (ca. 1547–1548). Drawing, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Icon. 189, fol. 54r

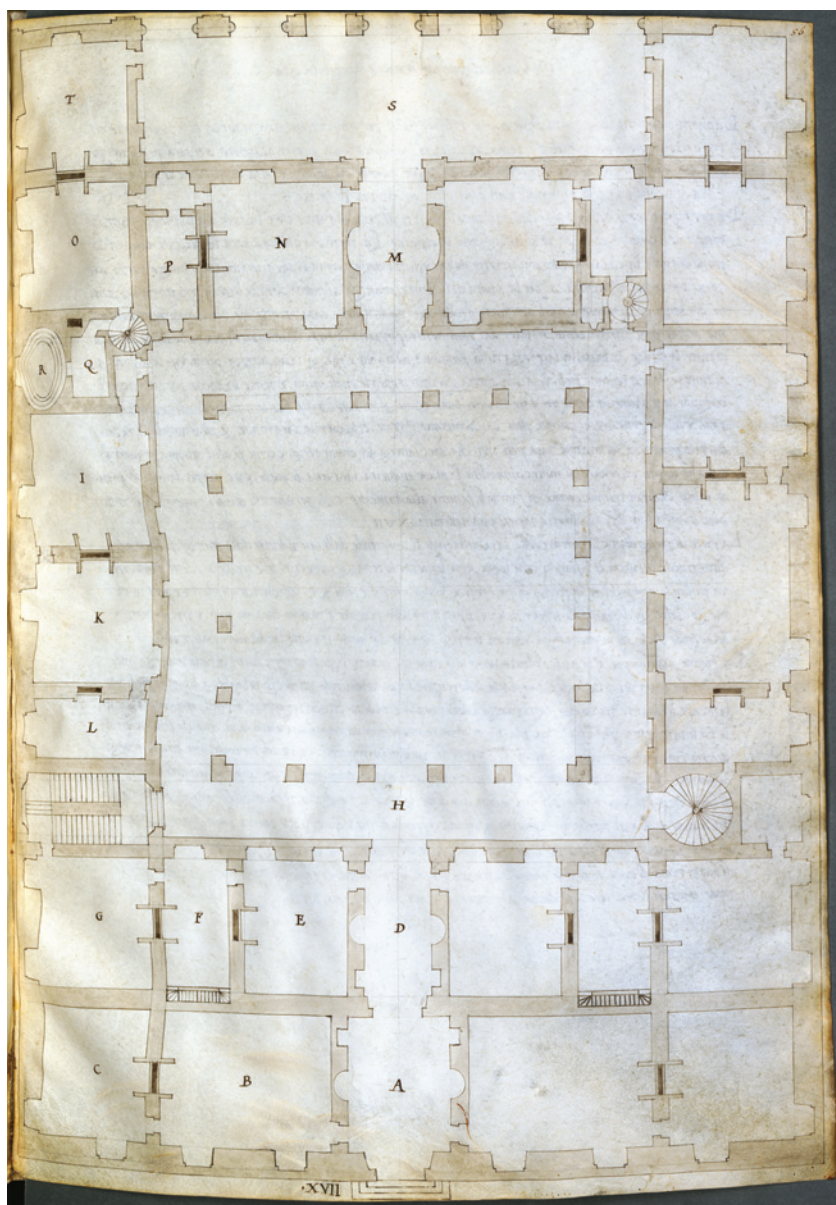


Fig. 5. Sebastiano Serlio, groundplan of a city palace in the mainland Italian custom (ca. 1547–1548). Drawing, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Icon. 189, fol. 56r



ornament to a building, almost like a crown'.<sup>49</sup> Thus Serlio praises the French dormer windows as a successful example of 'commodity and decorum in harmony', which is exactly the aim of his book. Time and again, Serlio pairs the argument of utility with that of beauty. In the Columbia MS, Serlio adds: 'because, in truth, a house is built firstly for commodity and secondly for decorum, but if both can be seen in a house, then that house will be closer to perfection'.<sup>50</sup> As pointed out by Rosci, Serlio was influenced by the ideas of the Paduan architectural dilettante Alvise Cornaro, who would also write a treatise focusing on houses of citizens, postulating that architecture should 'adorn and accommodate life'.<sup>51</sup> Cornaro stated 'I will always praise the honestly beautiful, but perfectly commodious building more than the very beautiful but incommodious one'.<sup>52</sup>

Serlio advised to compromise, anticipating criticism from both orthodox Vitruvians as well as (French) patrons who set value on their own customs. Therefore, extremes were to be avoided, for example when Serlio explains the design of a roof that is 'not entirely in the Italian style [*a la Italiana*], neither is it wholly French [*alla francese*], in fact I took the route which everyone must take, that is, the middle way'.<sup>53</sup> Fiore correctly observes that Serlio mostly refers to his designs as *partly* according to the Italian, French, or Venetian custom.<sup>54</sup> Stressing the flexibility of his method, Serlio demonstrates how local customs can be adjusted to meet the requirements of the classical decorum.

<sup>49</sup> Hart – Hicks, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* II, 20 (MMS, fol. 9v): 'perché nel vero elle sono grande ornamento di uno edificio, quasi come una corona'.

<sup>50</sup> CMS, fol. XV: 'per che nel vero la casa e fatta prima per la commodità: piu che per decoro: ma si è l'uno et l'altro in una casa sitroveva sara quella piu propingua alla perfeziona'.

<sup>51</sup> Rosci – Brizio, *Il Trattato* 26–28. Serlio praised Cornaro in the dedication to his book 4 as a great architect and promoter of all architects (Serlio, book 4, fol. 2) and he incorporated the design of his "Odeon" in Padua in his book 7 (218–223). See Fiocco G., "Alvise Cornaro e i suoi trattati sull'architettura", *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* 8, 4 (1952) 195–222; Fiocco G., *Alvise Cornaro. Il suo tempo e le sue opere* (Vicenza: 1965).

<sup>52</sup> Günther, "Studien" 53; Fiocco, "Alvise Cornaro" 208: 'io lauderò sempre più la fabrica honestamente bella, ma perfettamente commoda, che la bellissima et incommoda'.

<sup>53</sup> Hart – Hicks, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* II, 120 (MMS, fol. 58v): 'Il coperto di questa casa non è in tutto a la Italiana, neanche alla francese, ma ho tenuto quella via che ciascuno deve tenere, cioè la strada di mezzo'.

<sup>54</sup> Fiore F.P., "Il 'giudizio' in Sebastiano Serlio", in Beltramini G. et al. (eds.), *Studi in onore di Renato Cevese* (Vicenza: 2000) 241.

According to Fiore and Frommel, Serlio uses the *decoro* to 'correct and enrich' and 'reform and unify' vernacular models by means of a judicious application of the *regole generali*.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, this judgment, or *giudizio*, was central to Serlio's thought, and *architettura giudiziosa* can be regarded as Serlio's principal artistic ideal.<sup>56</sup>

Serlio's aim to gradually achieve a harmonization of decorum and local custom in the course of his book 6 was to be achieved in two distinct fields, since he differentiated between houses in the countryside and in the city:

The reason for this distinction is that while buildings made for the countryside ought to have a certain charm and pleasant aspect to onlookers, especially from afar, those to be built inside the city *must be made noble* with finer judgment, preserving in them a certain ornamented majesty, in the perfect proportion and harmony of the members throughout the entire body [my emphasis].<sup>57</sup>

Thus in each case the architect must decide what impression a building needs to make on its beholder, given the particular context. Serlio makes clear how the need for decorum increased in accord with the status of the owner and the representational profile of the location. Houses in the city were measured against those of their neighbours: being the objects of close scrutiny by highly critical connoisseurs of Vitruvius, they should be exemplary in their decoration. The use of classical ornamentation and the observance of harmony and proportion was the primary means to make a building look 'noble'. More liberties were allowed in the countryside. Here, few people would see the house up close so it should first of all be charming from a distance, especially in a volumetrical sense.<sup>58</sup>

The design for a royal lodging [Fig. 6] can serve as an example of this 'picturesque' approach to rural design. With its cupola, pointed gables, and domed turrets, it recalls French Loire châteaux like Chambord, as well as Italian villas and possibly the pavilion designs by Leonardo

<sup>55</sup> Fiore, "Il 'giudizio'" 241–245; Frommel, *Sebastiano Serlio* 353–354. See also Fiore, *Architettura civile* xxxii–xxxv.

<sup>56</sup> Fiore, "Il 'giudizio'" 237.

<sup>57</sup> Hart – Hicks, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* II, 3 (MMS, fol. 1r): 'perciò che gli edificii che si fano alla villa vogliono avere una certa vaghezza et dimostrazione piacevole a' riguardanti, et massimamente di lontano. Ma quelle fabbriche che si fano nelle città nobili si deonno fare con più maturo giudicio, ossevando u a certa maiestà decorata, tutta piena di proporzione et corrispondenzia di membri a tutto il corpo'.

<sup>58</sup> Rosci – Brizio, *Il Trattato* 60.

da Vinci, which Serlio may have studied in France.<sup>59</sup> Serlio recognizes the charm of French architectural planning as a quality distinct from ornament, the layer on top of the structure, and acknowledges its rich design potential. His method of design was thus based on a separation between planning and decoration. His design theory implies that decorum is defined by the viewer: in the countryside it has different implications than in the city. Whereas in the countryside one may dwell casually, enjoying certain architectural liberties, a house in the city must be 'dressed up' in a decorous garment reflecting its resident's position in society (and his connoisseurship of Vitruvius). Yet Serlio's connoisseurship went beyond a superficial application of Vitruvian rules, as he also digested Vitruvius's theoretical approach to domestic architecture. In the next sections we will look more closely at the relation between Serlio's book 6 and the sixth book of Vitruvius's treatise. But let us first discuss the intended audience of book 6 and the expectations of Serlio's readers.

### *Audience and expectations*

Aiming to address an international public with his publications, Serlio realized that some local traditions may be of interest beyond their places of origin. Yet his frequent apologies for 'licences' with respect to the Vitruvian doctrine indicate that this 'cultivation of the vernacular' was controversial to at least some of his readers. Serlio's book 6 must be viewed in the context of contemporary exegesis of Vitruvius, which was basically a pan-European undertaking of the humanist elite. But instead of writing in Latin, Serlio's books were to be bilingual in two vernaculars, French and Italian.<sup>60</sup>

Throughout the treatise Serlio's universal aspirations are evident; he repeatedly stresses that regardless of the 'style' of his designs, they could serve different countries. His readers are expected to read critically and to select the things that may be useful from the multitude of examples he proposes. So Serlio's flexibility works both ways: if regional or climatic circumstances require so, the architect can make adjustments to the design. For instance, Serlio points out that:

<sup>59</sup> Noted by Rosci – Brizio, *Il trattato* 24.

<sup>60</sup> As stated in the introductions to Serlio's books 1 and 2.



Fig. 6. Sebastiano Serlio, design for a royal house on the countryside (ca. 1547–1548). Drawing, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Icon. 189, fol. 42r

‘The French might think these heights too tall since these regions are windy and cold, but they could easily moderate this’.<sup>61</sup> At the same time he also warns that such adaptations might be criticized by ‘worthy architects’.

A passage from the manuscript of book 7 (censored in the final publication) reveals that Serlio was not always enthusiastic about local peculiarities. After suggesting that the height of a ceiling could be reduced, he exclaims:

But, O God above, everywhere I go I meet souls so base and used to such low, wretched, barbarically built houses – or perhaps they are prey to AVARICE – that, in order to avoid building three feet of wall since it does not match their preconceptions, they are happy to live in a pokey cellar. They excuse themselves saying that the area is cold, but the real reason is Lady Avarice or gross ignorance. Let us now return to the subject – I swerved off-course because I was so angry with people of this sort.<sup>62</sup>

It must be noted that many of such passages can be found in the Columbia MS of book 6 and the Vienna MS of book 7, but have been omitted in later versions of these books, obviously for political reasons. Rosenfeld notes how in these second versions Serlio also eliminated ‘some of the more unorthodox elements of French architecture’ to make the designs appear more Italian and more standardized.<sup>63</sup> She observes that the most significant changes in the Munich MS are concerned with decorative elements.<sup>64</sup> The planning of the projects is hardly ever changed. Rosenfeld argues that Serlio adapted the decoration of his designs to please his French patrons, who she presumes had developed a more orthodox taste after the recent wave of Vitruvius translations, commentaries, and treatises in France in the 1540s.<sup>65</sup> However, this does not explain the success of the highly licentious ‘Extra Book of Doors’. In fact, in the introduction to this book Serlio

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<sup>61</sup> Hart – Hicks, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* II, 97 (MMS, fol. 46v): ‘queste altezze alli francesi parerano troppo alte per essere questi paesi freddi e ventosi, ma potranno ben moderare questa cosa’.

<sup>62</sup> Hart – Hicks, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* II, 621 (Vienna MS of book 7, fol. 6v–7r).

<sup>63</sup> Rosenfeld, *On Domestic Architecture* 61–63.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

explicitly blames 'the country where I am living'.<sup>66</sup> This apology may be mere rhetoric, since this book focuses exclusively on ornament and does not deal with customs or requirements of local context.<sup>67</sup> In any case, there is no reason to suspect Serlio would have been any less licentious in Italy, where mannerism reigned.

Nevertheless, as Serlio was well aware, his flexibility with regard to the Vitruvian rules was criticized by the purists of the Vitruvian Academy in Rome (established 1540–1541).<sup>68</sup> Anticipating such criticism, Serlio states in his epilogue to book 6:

I have been somewhat licentious in certain things because I was in licentious countries. These things should be for those people who perhaps prefer licentious things to the elements which follow the rules; because the world was always like that, as the many antiquities in various parts of Europe bear witness, where there are more licentious elements than canonical things which follow the doctrine of Vitruvius.<sup>69</sup>

Thus Serlio uses both local custom and ancient precedent as justification for his licentiousness. Local customs are his favorite excuse: for instance when he agrees with his reader that the windows are too high according to Vitruvian standards, 'but this is acceptable here in this country'.<sup>70</sup> In another case he admits that the second floor of his design would be too high, 'But this is the custom in these parts; and in some places they build the second storey taller than the first as a matter of course'.<sup>71</sup> Serlio's effort to legitimize his rule-breaking with reference to local customs rather than antique remains is very exceptional. It implies that exigencies of decorum are defined by the

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<sup>66</sup> Hart – Hicks, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* II, xxx. This leads Hart and Hicks to argue that context should be considered as the most important factor in Serlio's departure from Vitruvian precepts.

<sup>67</sup> Serlio does mention his solitude and the wild animals in the forest of Fontainebleau as a source of inspiration.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., xxxv.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 154 (MMS, fol. 74r): 'Io ho pigliato in alcune cose qualche licencia per essere in paesi tali. Queste saranno per alcuni alli quali per avventura piaciono più le cose licenciose che le regolari, perciò che'l mondo fu sempre così, come ne fan fede tante antichità in diverse parti de l'Europa, dove si trovano più cose licenciose che regolari secondo la dotrina di Vitruvio'.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 90 (MMS, fol. 43v): 'ma lo paese di qua lo comporta'.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 100 (MMS, fol. 48v): 'ma questa costuma di qua porta così, anzi in alcuni luoghi si fa più alto l'ordine secondo che lo primo per consuetudine'.



(French) viewers; if they are not bothered by the licence, why should the architect be?

Thoroughly acquainted with Vitruvius's treatise, Serlio played a game of attracting and retaining its connoisseurs. For instance, let us take a closer look at the passage cited above, in which Serlio complains to his patron François de Dinteville that he 'would rather be a mediocre tailor, or a cobbler'.<sup>72</sup> In the context of a (begging) letter, this complaint about his want of reliable patronage was without doubt intended to incite his patron's generosity. But what has hitherto been unnoticed is that this passage contains an intricate paraphrase of Vitruvius's introduction to book 6:

No one tries to undertake any other craft at home, like *shoemaking, fulling, or those that are easier* – no craft but architecture, for the reason that those who profess it are called architects not on account of real skill, but falsely. This is why I thought that I should record the body of architecture and its governing principles as thoroughly as I can, thinking that this will be no unwelcome gift for all the nations [my emphasis].<sup>73</sup>

While Vitruvius used the example of lowly crafts like shoemaker or cobbler and fuller or 'mediocre tailor' [*sutrinam fullonicam*] to illustrate his aversion to architectural dilettantism, Serlio mentions the same professions in order to emphasize the lack of appreciation he receives in France. By 'inverting' this Vitruvian topos, Serlio plays on the erudition of his patron, praising him as the one who does know to appreciate his knowledge, while subtly reminding him of the still unpublished book 6.

### *Digesting Vitruvius*

In his first publication (book 4) Serlio gives 'general rules' that 'for the most part' agree with the doctrine of Vitruvius. That is, the Vitruvian description of the use of the classical orders (Vitruvius's book 3).

<sup>72</sup> See note 12 (Frommel, *Sebastiano Serlio* 32–38).

<sup>73</sup> Marcus Pollio Vitruvius, *De Architectura Liber VI*, Praefatio (tr. Rowland [1999] 76): 'itaque nemo artem ullam aliam conatur domi facere, uti sutrinam fullonicam aut ex ceteris quae sunt faciliores, nisi architecturam, ideo quod qui profitentur non arte vera sed falso nominantur architecti. quas obus res corpus architecturae rationesque eius putavi diligentissime conscribendas, opinans id munus omnibus gentibus non ingratum futurum'.



Among Vitruvius's ten books there was also one on domestic architecture (book 6), and Serlio must have studied this book very closely before writing his own book on the same subject. In fact, he paraphrases Vitruvius's sixth book at various instances. In the introduction to book 6, Serlio refers both to Vitruvius and Alberti, explaining that he will not discuss subjects that these writers have dealt with extensively, such as the choice of sites and the laying of foundations.<sup>74</sup> Instead, he will discuss decorum and *commodità*, exactly the two issues that would have interested patrons most, and that were insufficiently addressed in Vitruvius's book on domestic architecture.

So how is Vitruvius's book on domestic architecture organized? After a lengthy preface, Vitruvius's sixth book deals with the following issues: climate, symmetry and modifications to suit the site, the proportions of the principal rooms, the proper disposition of rooms, planning in relation to the owner, houses in the country, the Greek house, and foundations. Many of Vitruvius's precepts in this book concern ancient building types like *atria*, *palaestrae*, *triclinia*, etc., and were consequently of little use to sixteenth-century audiences.<sup>75</sup> Still, Vitruvius's distinction between houses in the city and in the country, and his insistence on adaptation to the specific demands of the owner, must have met with a wide response in circles of Vitruvius-reading patrons. Serlio's hierarchical arrangement of housing types may have been derived directly or indirectly from Vitruvius.<sup>76</sup> In the last of his 'fundamental principles' Vitruvius states:<sup>77</sup>

The other level of allocation [*distributio*] obtains when buildings are designed differently according to the habits of the heads of families, or the amount of money available, or to suit their prestige as public speakers. Urban dwellings ought to be set up in one way, and rustic holdings,

<sup>74</sup> Hart – Hicks, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* II, 3 (MMS, fol. 1r).

<sup>75</sup> This argument is used explicitly by Alvise Cornaro in his treatise. See Semenzato C. (ed.), "Alvise Cornaro: trattato di architettura" in Bassi E., et al. (eds.), *Pietro Cataneo, Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola, Trattati, con l'aggiunta degli scritti di architettura di Alvise Cornaro, Francesco Giorgi, Claudio Tolomei, Giangiorgio Trissino, Giorgio Vasari* (Milan: 1985) 101.

<sup>76</sup> It has been suggested that Serlio inherited this idea from Francesco di Giorgio, who equally may have based himself on Vitruvius. See Onians J., *Bearers of Meaning: The Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance* (Princeton NJ: 1988) 176.

<sup>77</sup> Vitruvius, *De Architectura Liber I*, 2, 1 (tr. Rowland [1999] 24–26). The other principles are ordering (*ordinatio*), design (*dispositio*), shapeliness (*eurhythmia*), symmetry (*symmetria*) and correctness (*decor*).

where harvests must be gathered, in another, the homes of moneylenders, certainly otherwise, and still otherwise the homes of those who are fortunate and sophisticated. For those powerful men by whose counsel the republic is governed, dwellings should be designed to accommodate their activities, and in every case the allocation of buildings should be appropriate to every different type of person.<sup>78</sup>

Vitruvius thus distinguished between *distributio* in the broad sense of economy, and in the sense of a functional arrangement of spaces. In his book on domestic architecture he elaborated this principle with a call for respecting the functional demands of each individual patron.<sup>79</sup>

Of course, these considerations also touched on matters of ornamentation, as defined by the principle of *decor*. Vitruvius's distinction between the two principles is clarified by Alina Payne, who points out how his term *decor* is primarily related to temple architecture, and *distributio* to that of houses.<sup>80</sup> According to Payne 'no canon looms in the background' of Vitruvius's domestic architecture, characterized as it is by a great variety of forms and uses. Vitruvius's principles of *decor* and *distributio* may thus have laid the basis for Serlio's approach to domestic architecture, manifested by its separation of planning as the distribution of spaces and ornamentation as the layer on top of this. Essentially, this is a similar distinction as that between *commodità* and *decoro*, which underlies Serlio's thought in book 6. And whereas Serlio considered decorum to be universal (but tied to class and defined by the viewer), habitability was largely dependent on local custom and climate. In fact, differentiation of housing types according to climatic circumstances was already propagated by Vitruvius:

These [symmetries] will be properly set out if first one takes into account in which regions and which latitudes of the world they are established. It seems necessary to develop the types of building in one way in Egypt, another way in Hispania, still differently in Pontus, otherwise in Rome, and so on, according to the distinctive properties of other lands and

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<sup>78</sup> Vitruvius, *De Architectura Liber I*, 2, 9 (tr. Rowland [1999] 26): 'alter gradus erit distributionis, cum ad usum patrum familiarum aut ad pecuniae copiam aut ad eloquentiae dignitatem aedificia aliter disponentur. namque aliter urbanas domos oportere constitui videtur, aliter quibus ex possessionibus rusticis influunt fructus, non item feneratoribus, aliter beatis et delicatis, potentibus vero quorum cogitationibus respublica gubernatur, ad usum conlocabuntur, et omnino faciendae sunt aptae omnibus personis aedificiorum distributiones'.

<sup>79</sup> Vitruvius, *De Architectura Liber VI*, 5 (tr. Rowland [1999] 80–81).

<sup>80</sup> Payne, *The Architectural Treatise* 40–41.

regions. For in one part of the world the earth is overwhelmed by the course of the sun, in another it stands far distant from it, in still other part it is held at a middling distance. Therefore, just as the firmament has been established along the earth with the signbearing circle and the course of the sun placed naturally at an incline and with dissimilar qualities, so, too, the placement of buildings ought to be directed by the properties of the regions and the varied nature of the heavens.<sup>81</sup>

Vitruvius proceeds to give an account of Roman as opposed to Greek housing types, yet in a very summary way. This very aspect of Vitruvius's book may have brought Serlio to the idea of juxtaposing French and Italian houses. Indeed, Vitruvius's obvious pluralism together with the defectiveness of his descriptions (and lack of illustrations) in his sixth book, may very well have been the impetus for Serlio's book 6. Instead of dictating basic principles in a systematic theoretical exposition, Serlio supplied a series of fictive designs in this book. As dissemination of Vitruvian principles was not his concern here, the book was rather meant to be complementary to Vitruvius's book 6. Claude Mignot points out how Serlio put forward an effective image of the interplay of Vitruvian parameters governing domestic architecture: climate, the status of the inhabitants, and the location, in the city or in the countryside.<sup>82</sup> Serlio thus adopts the method of Vitruvius, even if his designs do not always conform to Vitruvian design principles. Indeed, the very notion of a book as a set of designs (not in the sense of illustrations, but as concepts) seems to reflect Vitruvius's statement in his sixth book, that:

the difference between the inexpert and [architects] is this: the inexpert cannot recognize what the work will be until it is done, whereas the architect has both the finished and the unfinished project in mind, and

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<sup>81</sup> Vitruvius, *De Architectura Liber VI*, 1, 1 (tr. Rowland [1999] 76): 'haec autem ita erunt recte disposita, si primo animadversum fuerit quibus regionibus aut quibus inclinationibus mundi constituentur. namque aliter Aegypto, aliter Hispania, non eodem modo Ponto, dissimiliter Romae, item ceteris terrarum et regionum proprietatibus oportere videntur constitui genera aedificiorum, quod alia parte solis cursu premitur tellus, alia longe ab eo distat, alia per medium temperatur. igitur uti constitutio mundi ad terrae spatium inclinatione signiferi circuli et solis cursu disparibus qualitativibus naturaliter est conlocata, ad eundem modum etiam ad regionum rationes caelique varietates videntur aedificiorum debere dirigi conlocationes'.

<sup>82</sup> Mignot C., "Bâtir pour toutes sortes de personnes: Serlio, Du Cerceau, Le Muet et leurs successeurs en France: fortune d'une idée éditoriale", in Deswarte-Rosa S. (ed.), *Sebastiano Serlio à Lyon* (Lyon: 2004) 442.

before undertaking it has decided what it will be with regard to beauty and function and correctness.<sup>83</sup>

It was essentially this definition of the architect that Serlio adhered to, and which he paraphrases in the preface to book 4: 'this art which is as delightful to the mind when thinking of what is to be made, as it is to the eyes when it is made'.<sup>84</sup> The dissemination of this skill was his primary concern, and when he devised his designs for book 6 our architect certainly indulged in this delight of visualizing Vitruvius.

### Conclusion

By teaching architects, patrons, and construction workers a common language of drawing, Serlio wished to enable them to visualize designs in advance and thus communicate more efficiently and accurately. This was a central concern in Vitruvius's sixth book as well. Complementing Vitruvius by using 'efficient graphics' to convey this message, Serlio tried to promulgate a design theory in which *decorum* (defined by the viewer) and *commodità* (defined by the user) were in harmony. A comparison between Serlio's book 6 and Vitruvius's sixth book makes clear how closely the two books were related, perhaps not formally, but in spirit and method. Vitruvius pointed out the diversity of customs in different countries, yet his examples were summary. This was exactly what readers may have missed in Vitruvius. Aiming to offer a supplement to Vitruvius's treatise, Serlio's attitude toward local differences was informed by social and regional plurality as evinced by Vitruvius's sixth book. Like Vitruvius, Serlio valued foreign systems of planning linked to local 'ways of living' inherent to different climates and customs.

The significance of the dialectics between *commodità* and *decoro* is to emphasize a distinction between planning and decoration. Ser-

<sup>83</sup> Vitruvius, *De Architectura Liber VI*, 8, 10 (tr. Rowland [1999] 84): 'namque omnes homines, non solum architecti, quod est bonum possunt probare, sed inter idiotas et eos hoc est discrimen quod idiota nisi factum viderit, non potest scire quid sit futurum, architectus autem simul animo constituerit, antequam inceperit et venustate et usu et decore quale sit futurum habet definitum.'

<sup>84</sup> Hart – Hicks, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture* I, 253 (Serlio, book 4, v): 'Affin che ciascuno possa haver qualche cognition di quest'arte, che non è men dilettevole à l'animo, pensando à quel, che si ha à fare, che ella si sia à gli occhi, quando ella è fatta.'

lio's primary motive for the juxtaposition of Italian and French architectural traditions is to illustrate alternative ways of planning. After pointing out the differences between French and Italian solutions to the same problems, he gradually arrives at designs that are both in agreement with local custom and decorous, since the best results will be attained if these two qualities are in synthesis. Serlio makes clear that his French and 'hybrid' designs are no concessions. Thus it is demonstrated how a plurality of customs may be incorporated into – and, so to speak, domesticated by – classical decorum. In this case no polarity seems to have existed between classicism and the vernacular, but a system of assimilation, evincive of the complex dialogue between classicism and the vernacular.

### *Abbreviations*

- MMS Munich Manuscript of Serlio's book 6 (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Icon. 189).  
 CMS Columbia Manuscript of Serlio's book 6 (New York, Columbia University, Avery Architectural Library, Cat. No. X 720 Se 6).

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EXOTIC IMITATION AND LOCAL CULTIVATION:  
A STUDY ON THE ART FORM OF DUTCH DELFTWARE  
BETWEEN 1640 AND 1720<sup>1</sup>

Jing Sun

In modern research on Delftware, there is extensive literature discussing the subjects of technical development and collection, and it has been widely accepted that Delftware was highly inspired by Chinese porcelain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup> However, little scholarly attention has been dedicated to investigating exactly how Delftware artists borrowed from Chinese motifs and styles, and how they were able to combine the exotic appearance of Chinese porcelain with native Dutch characteristics and customs, thereby creating a unique and hybrid style of their own. This paper will focus primarily on two issues: first, strategies for how Dutch potters imitated decorations and motifs on Chinese porcelain; and second, how the potters assimilated these influences into Dutch native pictorial convention, creating a regionally specific style and art production. To address these issues, I mainly discuss Delftware made between 1640 and 1720.

Chinese porcelain was first brought to Europe in the sixteenth century when the Portuguese conducted occasional trade with China. It was regarded as a great rarity and reserved as curiosities by kings and nobles, as it had not been sold in substantial quantities in other Western European countries in this period. However, this situation soon changed when the Dutch developed great interest in the trade of Chinese porcelain. In 1602 and 1604, two large cargos of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain loaded on the *Sao Tiago* and the *Santa Catarina*, two Portuguese ships captured by the Dutch, were auctioned in Middelburg and Amsterdam. The sensational interest created by these

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Willemijn Fock, Todd Richardson and Joost Keizer for their very helpful comments on this paper.

<sup>2</sup> In this article the term *Delftware* is used to indicate tin-glazed earthenware made in the Netherlands from ca. 1625. Although the town of Delft was not the only place of manufacture in the Netherlands, the term Delftware named after the town Delft had been generally used in the seventeenth century and even nowadays.



auctions further stimulated Dutch desire to trade with China.<sup>3</sup> From the early seventeenth century, when the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, or VOC, founded in 1602) established more regular commercial links with China, Chinese blue-and-white porcelain was shipped in enormous quantities to Amsterdam and further distributed throughout Europe. According to an estimate based on the official records of the VOC, more than three million pieces of Chinese porcelain were shipped to Europe by the VOC between 1602 and 1657.<sup>4</sup>

Soon, the large and regular supply of relatively inexpensive Chinese porcelain considerably threatened the pottery business of majolica, the main production in the Dutch market before the appearance of Chinese porcelain. Majolica originated in Italy and was developed in Holland in the first half of the sixteenth century when a number of specialist majolica potters from Antwerp immigrated to towns in Holland.<sup>5</sup> Normally, the majolica product had a white tin glaze on fired clay decorated with polychrome enamel painting. In contrast to the majolica, Chinese blue-and-white porcelain was made of specific clay, usually painted with cobalt decoration, applied in many layers, and glazed with a transparent porcelain glaze and fired at a temperature approaching 1350°C. With such a process, Chinese porcelain had many significant characters, such as the translucent body showing through the clear glaze, the fine blue hue, the exotic decoration, the thinness and durability. These features were so remarkable that the early crude native earthenware could hardly compete with Chinese porcelain. In order not to completely lose their position in the market, some Dutch potters modified their production using the techniques and decoration of Chinese porcelain to meet market demand.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On the trade of Chinese porcelain, see Jörg C.J.A., *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade* (The Hague: 1982).

<sup>4</sup> Volker T., *Porcelain and the Dutch East India Company, as Recorded in the Dag-Registers of Batavia Castle, Those of Hirado and Deshima and Other Contemporary Papers 1602–1682* (Leiden: 1954) 227.

<sup>5</sup> For the history of majolica in Holland, see Van Dam J.D., *Delfts Aardewerk: Een Proeve Tot Her-Ijking* (Amsterdam: 2004) 11–15; Scholten F., *Dutch Majolica and Delftware, 1550–1700: The Edwin Van Dreht Collection* (Amsterdam: 1993) 13–16.

<sup>6</sup> For the role Chinese porcelain played in the transition from majolica to Delft pottery, see Van Aken-Fehmers M., *Delfts Aardewerk: Geschiedenis van een nationaal product* Vol. I (Zwolle-Den Haag: 1999); Van Dam J.D., *Geleyersgoet en Hollants Porceleyn* ('s-Gravenhage: 1982).

*Technical improvement and imitation of the blue-and-white color scheme of Chinese porcelain*

Attempts had been made to discover the mysterious technique and composition of Chinese porcelain. But neither the specific technique nor the required standard Chinese formula, *kaolin*, a white Chinese clay, was clear to the potters. Although they lacked the technical knowledge of the methods and materials used to produce Chinese porcelain, some Dutch potters still attempted to improve their product by gaining a close resemblance to the appearance of Chinese porcelain.<sup>7</sup> Generally speaking, these improvements focused on materials, the firing process, and certain changes in tin and lead glazes.<sup>8</sup> For instance, the clay was improved by adding marl, a soil containing more chalk, and by thinning the mixture down with more water. This enabled the potter to produce slurry, a much better material than the impure and rough clay. The slurry was then purified and dried in sieves until it formed a readily kneadable mass. The mass was shaped into plates and dishes with the aid of moulds. Moreover, from the late 1620s, *saggars* (a lidded ceramic container used to enclose or protect ware from kiln debris), was commonly used in Delft factories to protect the wares during firing, resulting in the disappearance of spurmarks and blemishes – which were often highly visible on the majolica – on the improved products. A further external enhancement made during the second and third decades of the seventeenth century is the tin glaze. In majolica pieces, the tin glaze was only used for the upper part of dishes and the outside of jugs; the remaining parts were painted with cloudy lead glaze. Aiming to achieve an appearance closer to Chinese porcelain, the potters covered all the surfaces of the product with tin glaze and applied an extra colorless layer of gloss on top of it, which created an appearance as shiny as porcelain.<sup>9</sup> With these improvements, Dutch potters managed to produce earthenware that was much thinner and finer than the coarse majolica and to achieve a greater resemblance to Chinese porcelain. Such earthenware

<sup>7</sup> While Chinese porcelain entered the Dutch market at the beginning of seventeenth century, the blue-and-white earthenware soon became much favored by the Dutch potteries.

<sup>8</sup> For the technical innovations, see Jörg C.J.A., *Interaction in Ceramics: Oriental Porcelain and Delftware* (Hong Kong: 1984)19; Scholten, *Dutch Majolica and Delftware* 20–23.

<sup>9</sup> Scholten, *Dutch Majolica and Delftware* 20.

was called *Hollandts porceleyn*, even though true porcelain was never made in Holland in the seventeenth century. (In 1708 true porcelain production began in Meissen, Germany.)<sup>10</sup> In addition, because these developments primarily took place in Haarlem and Delft in particular, the names *Delft porcelain* and *Delft pottery* soon became commonplace.<sup>11</sup>

Another significant effort made by Dutch potters to obtain the maximum resemblance to Chinese porcelain from about 1615 onward is the adoption of a blue-and-white color scheme. The use of underglaze cobalt blue against the white ground is a remarkable feature of Chinese porcelain exported to European market. The vogue for this exotic color scheme led to much experimentation on Dutch earthenware. Potters first painted cobalt blues on the earthenware, then gave depth and smoothness to the fired surface, and in the end covered the earthenware with a clear lead glaze on top of the tin glaze with enamel patterns.<sup>12</sup> This refined type of ware had a closer resemblance to Chinese blue-and-white porcelain. Moreover, its appearance was more extraordinary because it was rendered through the combination of the original colors of the Dutch palette with the dominating blue. The blue-and-white color scheme became so common at many faience factories in Delft that it was no longer a unique characteristic of Chinese porcelain, but a specific feature of the products made in Delft. And accordingly, the term 'Delft blue' soon became the general name for all earthenware objects and tiles painted with the same blue color, regardless of whether they were actually made in Delft.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The first European hard-paste porcelain was developed from 1708 in Meissen, Germany, by Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus. See Jörg, *Interaction in Ceramics* 22–23.

<sup>11</sup> The term *Delft porcelain* is first mentioned in Rotterdam in 1632. Today, Delft pottery is often called *faience* to distinguish it from the older majolica. See Van Aken-Fehmers, *Delfts Aardewerk* 9.

<sup>12</sup> On the materials used in the initial delftware production and its working progress, see Jörg, *Interaction in Ceramics* 19; Scholten, *Dutch Majolica and Delftware*. 20–22.

<sup>13</sup> In addition to the blue-and-white color scheme, Delftware later was produced in polychrome following various types of polychrome porcelains exported to the Netherlands from Japan and China, particularly at the end of seventeenth century.

*Imitation of Chinese porcelain decorations*

From 1620 onward, the influence of Chinese porcelain was reflected not only in the use of blue painting against a white background, but also in the imitation of Chinese decorations. This is particularly evident from the 1640s to the 1680s when the Chinese export trade was seriously hampered by internal warfare and the import of Chinese porcelain suffered a sharp decline in the Dutch market. This was taken as a great opportunity for the faience factories, which reacted quickly to supplement the reduction in supply and satisfy market demand. Two Delft factories, *De Porceleyne Schotel* and *De Porceleyne Lampetkan*, played a leading role in filling the gap by switching their entire production to pottery copies of Chinese porcelain. Other factories followed their lead, creating a rapid increase in the entire industry, so that by 1665 there were more than twenty faience factories in Delft engaged in this production, which made up a significant proportion of the imitation porcelain sold in the market.<sup>14</sup>

These factories imitated Chinese porcelain as best as they could, aiming to create a sort of pottery that would be difficult to distinguish from the Chinese prototypes. This included becoming familiar with different Chinese motifs and incorporating them into Delftware designs. The type of porcelain frequently copied in the early phase was called *Kraak porselein*, a term derived from *carrack* or *kraak*, the type of ship used by the Portuguese to conduct trade.<sup>15</sup> As one of the chief products of the VOC's shipments to Holland in the first thirty years of the seventeenth century, Kraak porcelain was greatly admired in the West owing to its fine white paste and vibrant decoration in underglaze blue. Generally speaking, pieces of Kraak porcelain are well painted in a sketchy manner and decorated in a specific format: wide or narrow panels filled with Buddhist, Taoist, or other fortune symbols alternating with sprays of fruits or flowers painted on the wide rim of the plates or interiors and exteriors of the bowls. A rocky landscape with one or more human figures or animals such as deer and birds,

<sup>14</sup> Stodel J., *The Splendour of Dutch Delftware* (Amsterdam: 1993) 9–10.

<sup>15</sup> Kraak porcelain traditionally has been dated to the reign of the Wanli emperor (1573–1619), with some later wares of similar appearance included in this category. For more information on Chinese Kraak porcelain, see Vainker S.J., *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain* (London: 1991) 147; Rinaldi M., *Kraak Porcelain: A Moment in the History of Trade* (London: 1989) 60–71.



Fig. 1. Dish, China (early 17th century). 28.6 cm (D).  
The Hans Syz Collection.

and occasionally Chinese symbols, are displayed in the central area of bowls, plates, and dishes.<sup>16</sup> For instance, Fig. 1 is a typical Chinese Kraak porcelain dish with a standard arrangement of the most common decorative motifs. The scene in the center shows a popular ducks-in-a-pond motif that ducks standing on the rock and surrounded by flowers and plants.<sup>17</sup> The border is divided into narrow panels with tassels and wide panels with auspicious symbols, flowers, and fruit sprays.

The specific border decorations and exotic motifs in the center were copied in majolica first, then more frequently in Delftware for a relatively long period from the mid-seventeenth century on. For the early majolica product, the imitation was very coarsely made with rough strokes and the representation of Chinese prototype symbol could hardly be recognized. But later, the Delft factories were able to

<sup>16</sup> Rinaldi, *Kraak Porcelain* 25–40; Emerson, *Porcelain Stories* 100–105; Jörg, *Interaction in Ceramics* 22–23.

<sup>17</sup> The ducks-in-a-pond motif was a very popular and long lasting motif in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in China. See Rinaldi M., *Kraak Porcelain* 83.



Fig. 2. Plate with Wanli pattern, Delft (1698–1701). 26 cm (D).  
Salomon Stodel Antiquités, Amsterdam.

produce wares equivalent to the refined quality of Chinese porcelain. The small dish illustrated in Fig. 2 shows a good example. It is decorated in blue with alternating broad and narrow panels which are filled with Chinese auspicious symbols. The scene in the central area is the popular naturalistic duck-in-a-pond motif, which is apparently copied from Chinese porcelain. It looks astonishingly similar to Chinese prototype. However, with closer observation it is evident that the potter did not completely stick to a Chinese model, but interpreted the Chinese patterns freely: some of the religious Chinese symbols on the border have been replaced by fish. These details suggest that the Dutch potters did not understand or were not concerned with the exact form and meaning of the Chinese Taoist and Buddhist symbols; they were only interested in certain decorative elements they could assimilate in their own work in order to create an exotic appearance. Nevertheless, the potters were quite familiar with the patterns of Chinese porcelain, and ceramics with the Kraak decorations were favored in the Dutch market for decades.

Kraak porcelain went out of fashion around the 1680s when Chinese porcelain with a different style of decoration reached Europe. This type is the so-called transitional porcelain, which was mainly made between





Fig. 3. Plate, China (early 18th century). Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum.

1620 and 1683, the period witnessed the fall of the Ming dynasty and the rise of the Qing dynasty.<sup>18</sup> It was frequently imitated by Dutch potters from the second quarter of the seventeenth century.<sup>19</sup> Transitional porcelain differs greatly from Kraak porcelain in its decoration – no longer confined in panels, it combines traditional motifs such as landscape scenes with lively figures and animals painted in various shades of underglaze blue.<sup>20</sup> These motifs are usually derived from woodcut illustrations of Chinese novels and plays, whose appearance is quite close to Chinese traditional drawings and paintings. In Fig. 3, the scene in the middle shows a man in an interior supported by a servant with a woman behind him. The border is filled with diamond patterns and four cartouches with sprays of flowers painted in underglaze blue. The scenes had evolved through centuries of stylized landscape depiction, such as the rocks in the foreground and the mountains among cloud and mist outside of the door. Apparently, the fanciful landscape con-

<sup>18</sup> Little S., *Chinese Ceramics of the Transitional Period, 1620–1683* (New York: 1983) 1.

<sup>19</sup> Van Dam, *Delfts Aardewerk* 74.

<sup>20</sup> Jörg C. J. A. *Chinese ceramics in the collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam: the Ming and Qing dynasties* (Amsterdam: 1997) 74.





Fig. 4. Plate, Delft (ca. 1660–1680). 19.8 cm (D). The Edwin van Drecht Collection.

structed by these elements does not come from life; it is a convention of Chinese painting, conveying the *literati's* ideal realm, which would be instantly recognizable by Chinese viewers.

The fanciful design in Chinese transitional porcelain was also admired by Dutch potters even though they had no knowledge of its essential meaning. But it was not easy for the potters to faithfully follow Chinese prototypes, because compared with the Kraak porcelain the design in Chinese transitional porcelain was more elaborate and lively. So the potters preferred to simply imitate Chinese design and sometime transform these representations with their own comprehension of the superficial representation rather than the substantial meaning of these details. For instance, Fig. 4 shows a dish with a seated Chinese figure in an interior. Both this and Fig. 3 have rocks in the foreground and the landscape is visible through the open door. But the rocks in Fig. 4 are less remarkable than the ones in the Chinese dish and the landscape is also replaced by a Western-style house. Apparently here the theme is derived from Chinese transitional porcelain, but the treatment of details is in a Western manner. A similar approach is found on the rim of the dish: instead of patterns made up of Chinese traditional symbols, the rim is filled with figures and Western houses repeated from the center of the dish. Therefore, although this dish

still gives an impression of Chinese transitional porcelain, it is actually far removed from a Chinese manner, having more characteristics of Dutch art. This is the same holds for the representation of the Chinese figure. Although this figure wears a robe, implying his Chinese identity, the face, hair, and robe are so roughly and awkwardly represented that he would never have been recognized by a contemporary Chinese audience as a Chinese figure. As one of the Dutch potters' attempts to gain ground in their competition with Chinese competitors, the hybrid of Chinese transitional porcelain and European scenes clearly reveals a free attitude toward the Chinese motifs adopted by late seventeenth-century potters.<sup>21</sup> That is to say, although they frequently copied Chinese symbolic patterns – landscapes, temples, plants, animals, and costumes – and were sometimes even able to produce equally refined Chinese porcelain, their primary concern is the fanciful effects of a combined exotic and vernacular visual vocabulary, rather than the exact imitation of Chinese prototypes.

### *The Chinoiserie style*

From the 1650s onward, some Delft potters, however, were no longer satisfied with simply imitating decorations from Chinese porcelain. They began to create more refined plates, jugs, and dishes with innovative decorative motifs depicting imaginary and whimsical interpretations of life in Asia, which were inspired by a blend of factual accounts and fantasy. The style reflecting Chinese and other Asian countries' artistic influence became known in Europe as *Chinoiserie* in the mid-seventeenth century and reached its peak when it was assimilated into European Rococo ornamentation in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

Delftware is one of the first clear Dutch examples of *Chinoiserie* and it contributed to the further development of the style in Europe, especially after being exported to other European countries.<sup>23</sup> Potters were inspired by the strange customs and exotic flora and fauna of the East, and presented in their work exotic figures clothed in flowing robes and elaborate headdresses situated in fanciful landscape settings. In

<sup>21</sup> Jörg, *Interaction in Ceramics* 19–20.

<sup>22</sup> On how Delftware imitated Chinese porcelain and developed the *Chinoiserie* style in the seventeenth century, see Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie* (London, 1973) 47–48.

<sup>23</sup> Jörg, *Interaction in Ceramics* 20.



Fig. 5. Vase, Delft (ca. 1680). 58 cm (H). Aronson Antiquairs, Amsterdam.

addition to the decorations on the exported Chinese porcelain, potters also got the quaint and curious motifs of China from the illustrations and accounts by returning travelers. The most impressive travelogue about China in the seventeenth century is the book *An account of the meeting between the delegation of the Dutch East India Company and the Great Tatar Chan, now Emperor of China*.<sup>24</sup> With more than 150 illustrations that comprehensively presented Chinese people, costumes, customs, cityscapes, architecture, flora, and fauna, it offered a substantial source for the development of *Chinoiserie*. It was written by Johan Nieuhof, who joined the first Dutch embassy visit to China between 1655 and 1657. Soon after its first publication in Amsterdam in 1665, its distinguished illustrations were widely duplicated, serving as models for decorative designs on lacquer ware, silver, textiles, and, in particular, Delftware. A Delft earthenware vase [Fig. 5], for

<sup>24</sup> Johan Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, aan den Grooten Tartarischen Cham, den Tegenwoordigen Keizer van China* (Amsterdam: 1665).

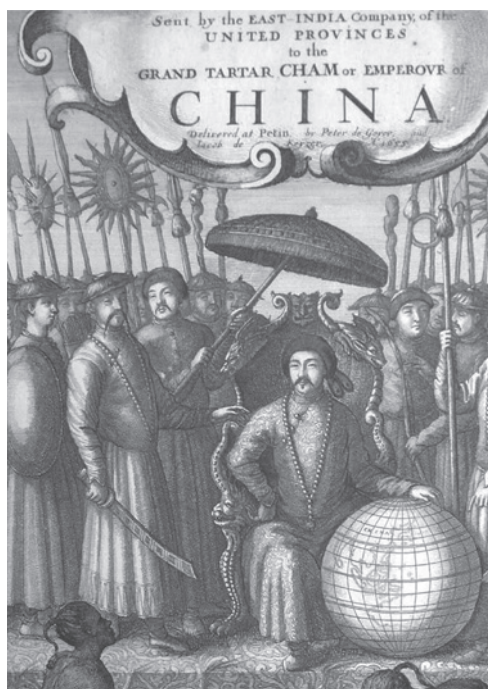


Fig. 6. Copper engraving from J. Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie [...]* (Amsterdam, 1665).

example, shows the Chinese emperor surrounded by Chinese officials and seated on the throne. The compositional arrangement and details, including the globe, Chinese canopy, and various weapons, are apparently reproduced after the design of the title page of Nieuhof's book [Fig. 6].

It is noteworthy, however, that even though these illustrations were produced in a Western manner and both Nieuhof and his publisher claimed that they were made after life, many exotic decorations, such as the strange architecture, the fanciful cityscapes, and the exotic plants and animals, would never have appeared in China. This potentially questions the validity of Nieuhof's claim to be an eyewitness in China. Many scenes, in fact, are fabricated according to Nieuhof's or the engraver's own fashion. Taking the title page as an example, the scene of the emperor surrounded by officials is more like a European court scene, since Chinese imperial court is always rigidly stratified and officials would not have appeared in equal positions.

In addition to employing Nieuhof's illustrations, the potters also adopted his liberal approach in dealing with depiction of China and its customs. They often went far beyond Nieuhof's original designs: they extracted various Chinese elements from different sources and handled them in a Western manner to invent imaginary scenes of the mysterious Far East.

Fig. 7 is a very interesting example showing the extent to which a potter would go to reinterpret the image of China on the basis of Nieuhof's design and create an imaginary image of China. It is a wall decoration, a plaque (a large tile) of Delftware pottery, painted by an unknown artist at the end of the seventeenth century. Decorated in blue and white, this plaque generally offers an impression of the fashion of Chinese porcelain, and moreover, it represents a festive view of life in China: a river full of pleasure boats, circus attractions on the riverbank, and happy people everywhere. The potter must have been very familiar with the illustrations in Nieuhof's book. Motifs such as the boats sailing on the water, the figure who is striking his bare head against a stone, the figure who is supporting a long pole with another one standing on top, the city wall and tower on the left side, and the pagodas emerging here and there, are all obviously derived from the engravings in Nieuhof's book [Fig. 8]. But rather than simply copying one single print from Nieuhof's manuscript, the potter extracted elements from different illustrations and combined them into a single image. Moreover, he randomly inserted other exotic motifs from that period, such as Japanese figures and Indonesian coconut trees. Various flowers, plants, and animals from unknown sources are displayed in the foreground, framing the plaque in a typical Dutch pictorial convention. This case suggests that potters preferred to represent a mysterious country marked by a strongly European sense of fantasy and frivolity by selecting Chinese elements at their liberty and compiling them in their own way, aiming to attract the general public. This is also an act of assimilating foreign elements, especially Chinese characteristics, by mixing Dutch identities or an imagination of non-Dutch culture and further translating them into Delftware.

Some potters and artists went even further that they designed 'some elegant models of porcelains' by themselves serving as examples for porcelains made in China.<sup>25</sup> A unique example is Pronk porcelain,

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<sup>25</sup> Jörg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade* 97.





Fig. 7. Plaque with chinoiserie decoration (1680–1700). 63cm (H), 92 cm (W). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Fig. 8. Copper engravings from J. Nieuwhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandische Oost-Indische Compagnie* [...] (Amsterdam, 1665).





Fig. 9. Cornelis Pronk, *The Parasol Lady* (1734–1738).  
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

named after the Amsterdam artist Cornelis Pronk (1691–1759), who was commissioned by the VOC in 1734 to make sets of drawings for the decoration of Chinese porcelain.<sup>26</sup> One of his designs on the plate illustrated in Fig. 9 is generally called ‘The Parasol Lady’. It represents a lady standing beside the water’s edge with reeds, who gestures toward three birds on the ground in front of her and to her maid holding an ornate parasol behind her. The border is painted with rows of chamfered rectangles in which four large cartouches are filled with birds repeated from the central scene and four small cartouches filled with the ladies from the central scene. This design of Chinese daily

<sup>26</sup> The set of drawings was sent to Batavia and thence to Canton in 1736. Dinner services, tea sets, and other items decorated with this design were produced in underglaze blue, Chinese Imari and polychrome enamels sent to the Netherlands in 1737 and 1738. See Jörg C.J.A., *Pronk Porselein* (Groningen: 1980) 20.

life was not likely to be seen in contemporary China; rather, it was made 'according to the fancies of the Chinese' which in fact reflected a European's imagination of this fanciful country.<sup>27</sup>

*From Chinoiserie to European motif*

When porcelain with decorations of China became more and more common, the fashion generally shifted to the representation of European motive. Corresponding response again appeared in the market. Initially, the VOC sent models and designs of Western scenes to China as examples for Chinese potters to produce porcelain, namely, *Chine de Command*, to satisfy the Western taste for the unusual combination of porcelain and Western motifs.<sup>28</sup> These motifs include a multitude of subjects ranging from classical mythology and historical events to portraits and landscapes for the Dutch market.<sup>29</sup> But such specific orders for *Chine de Command* proved not to be practical mainly for two reasons. First, it often took a long time for Western clients to send European models to Chinese porcelain painters and get the finished products back. Second, and more importantly, these wares were ordered and made in small quantities and therefore very expensive. As little profit was made, the VOC gradually stopped ordering this sort of porcelain.

Unsurprisingly, the Dutch potters soon began to take advantage of this market demand for displaying Western motifs on porcelains. This development was also an important reaction to the renewed importation of Chinese porcelain, which returned to the European market

<sup>27</sup> The VOC had specific requirements for Chinese exported porcelain to be made after the Company's design, including the decoration, shape and size. See Jörg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade* 100–103.

<sup>28</sup> Jörg, *Porcelain and the Dutch China Trade* 95–102. For more information on Chinese export porcelain, see Lunsingh Scheurleer D.F., *Chinese Export Porcelain* (London: 1974); Jörg C.J.A. – Hoi-chiu T., *Chinese Export Porcelain: Chine De Commande from the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels* (Hong Kong: 1989); Le Corbeiller C., *China Trade Porcelain: Patterns of Exchange, Additions to the Helena Woolworth McCann Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: 1974); Jörg C.J.A., "A Pattern of Exchange: Jan Luyken and 'Chine de Commande' Porcelain", *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 37 (2002) 171–176.

<sup>29</sup> Personalized motifs were also specially ordered, such as the armorial porcelain which was decorated with family coats of arms. For more information on Chinese armorial porcelain for the Dutch market in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Kroes J., *Chinese Armorial Porcelain for the Dutch Market* (Zwolle: 2007).



Fig. 10. Large oval dish, Delft (1690–1700). 57cm (W), 45.5cm (H). Salomon Stodel Antiquités, Amsterdam.

in large quantities from 1683 and was a formidable competitor once again for blue-and-white Delftware.<sup>30</sup>

In this period, Delft potters made appropriate adaptations and refinements by combining Western motifs and Chinese decoration in products in which the Chinese or *Chinoiserie* design is subordinated to the European style. The large oval dish [Fig. 10], a commission from William and Mary to 'De Grieksche A' factory, presents a good example.<sup>31</sup> The dish's wide, flat rim is decorated with typical Chinese patterns of flora and fauna; however, its deep center displays a classical European scene of several nude *putti* standing on the ground and two others flying in the air. Apparently, the European motif dominates the whole design and some of the flowers, such as the tulip on the right side, also reflect Dutch culture. This not only suggests that the Dutch potter shifted his focus from the Chinese to Dutch visual sensibilities to accommodate Western taste, but also clearly demonstrates how the Dutch had developed their own hybrid style that differed from Chinese porcelain.

<sup>30</sup> Stodel, *The Splendour of Dutch Delftware* 12.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 32–33.

By the end of the seventeenth and especially the early eighteenth century, when Chinese patterns appeared to have lost some of their attractiveness, more original Dutch painting came to be distinctive. The designs used in Delftware are parallel to the developments in the Dutch fine art paintings and prints of the same period. Although potter painters were skilled in their craft, they in general did not take the initiative to invent their own compositions. Normally they would use elements from several engravings, so that it is hard to trace any single direct source for their design. The diverse theme that painted on Delftware, such as biblical motifs, genre scenes and landscapes, were so popular that it developed a uniquely native character of Delftware all the more. As a result, Delftware decorated with Western motifs became fashionable in Europe during the eighteenth century. Therefore, regarding to the decoration and motif, Delftware makers first followed the decorative patterns on Chinese prototypes, later assimilating Chinese elements and combining them with European motifs in order to invent an exotic effect to satisfy the market demand and develop a style of their own.

### *The development of the shape*

Not only did Delft earthenware of the period resemble Chinese porcelain in terms of decoration, it also imitated Chinese porcelain's shape and further developed its own style on that basis. Chinese porcelain imported by the VOC in large quantities in the early period consisted mainly of ordinary pieces such as bowls, cups, and dishes. Occasionally, porcelain in the form of figurines and animals could be found among the special exports to the Netherlands, for instance, the figure of goddess of mercy Guanyin [Fig. 11]. In front of a semicircular background of high pierced rocks, Guanyin is seated on a lotus flower rising from the water, indicated by curling waves. The head and tail of two carp emerge from the water and a vase is placed on the rock in the middle. On either side of Guanyin there is an acolyte standing on a lotus leaf. Instead of blue and white, this work is covered with green and yellow enamel.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jörg, *Chinese Ceramics in the Collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam: The Ming and Qing Dynasties* 184.



Fig. 11. Guanyin, China (early 18th century). 28.3 cm (H), 20.5 / 9.2 cm (base). From Gorer, art dealers, London, 1919.

This work portrays the exotic features and fashion styles of China, which made it much favored by Europeans and frequently represented by Dutch potters. In the Delftware polychrome reproduction of the Guanyin piece [Fig. 12], for example, Guanyin is portrayed in a classic posture of Chinese pictorial convention, i.e., she sits on a lotus throne with her hands together and legs crossed, and two vases flanked by two dragon heads emerging from the sea appear on either side of Guanyin.<sup>33</sup>

While this reproduction shares similarities with its Chinese prototype, however, rather than faithfully copying from the original, the figurines' form and decoration were subjected to the potter's personal interpretation. With closer observation it is evident that the shape of

<sup>33</sup> Van Aken-Fehmers M., *Delfts aardewerk: geschiedenis van een nationaal product*, vol. IV (The Hague, 2007) 256.





Fig. 12. Flower holder in the form of the goddess Guanyin (1701–1722). 16.9 cm (H), 12.2 cm (W), 9.6 cm (D). Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

the statue of Guanyin has changed a lot in the Delftware reproduction. The most significant difference is the two vases in the Delftware interpretation. According to Chinese convention, there is always one single vase held in Guanyin's hand as she pours out holy water to save the multitude. In the Delftware version, however, there are two large vases that stand in for the two acolytes at either side of the lotus throne in the original – this is probably a result of the Delft potters seeking compositional balance. Moreover, the two carps under the lotus in the Chinese original are substituted by two dragon heads whose appearance is more European than traditional Chinese. The grotesque statuette is apparently a free interpretation of a Chinese original in the pursuit of more exotic effects that appealed to the local audience.

Since the Delft 'porcelain' potters excelled in the art of combining stylistic elements from East and West to produce hybrid, contemporary designs, they made a significant artistic contribution during the spread



Fig. 13. Flower pyramid (1690–1720). 104 cm (H). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

of this new fashion. The flower pyramid [Fig. 13] is a good illustration. It was called ‘flower pot with spouts’ in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and is nowadays commonly, but inaccurately, known as a tulip vase.<sup>34</sup> Delft potteries were commissioned by William III, his wife Mary II, and their court to make impressive flower vases and other imposing pieces, and the flower pyramid was their significant design. This pyramid stands one meter high and consists of nine separate vases in decreasing size stacked one on top of another. A rod in the middle holds them together. The shape of the flower vase references the Egyptian obelisk form as well as a Chinese pagoda, such as the famous Porcelain Pagoda in Nanking. This pagoda, popular with contemporary Europeans, was first illustrated in Nieuwhof’s book [Fig. 14]. Both the vase and Nieuwhof’s pagoda illustration reveal the strong appeal of the pagoda form to the contemporary imagination as

<sup>34</sup> Van Aken-Fehmers M., “Delft potteries producing ‘porcelain’ vases with spouts 1680–1740”, Van Aken-Fehmers M. – Sarah A.B. (eds), *Delfts aardewerk: geschiedenis van een nationaal product*, vol. IV, 9–28.



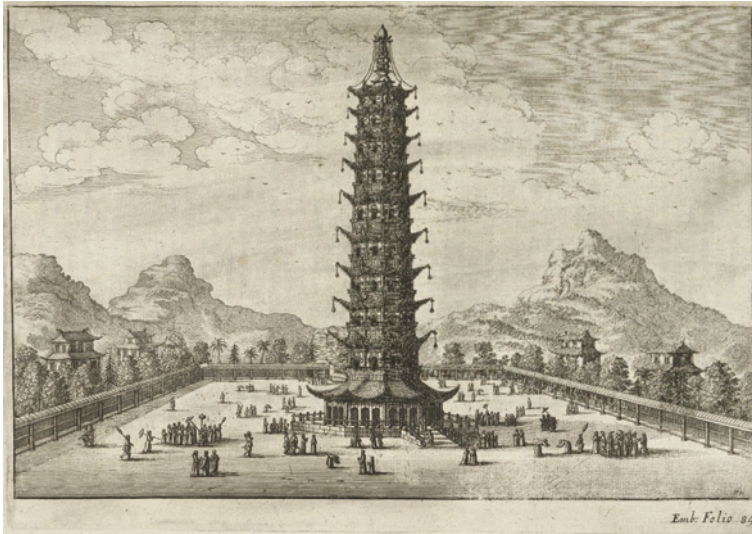


Fig. 14. Copper engraving from J. Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie* [...] (Amsterdam, 1665).

a typical example of Chinese exoticism. Dutch potters transformed it to be a specific design of their own. Moreover, the vase's lavish decoration also reveals a mixture of influences, for instance, the base of the pyramid is decorated with an obvious Chinese-style landscape featuring a pagoda.

More typically Delftware makers retained the pottery pieces' native shapes derived from European silver and wooden ware, but decorated these objects in a blue-and-white color scheme and Chinese motifs. These ordinary objects have an extraordinary appearance. The most common object is the tile, which played an important role in the domestic architecture of Holland for a long period. The tile was first introduced from and influenced by Italian prototypes, which were often decorated with ornamental patterns in blue, green, purple, orange-brown, and bright yellow. Later, when Chinese porcelain was imported to Holland, tile design began to take inspiration from Chinese porcelain, particularly the blue-and-white color scheme, which had proved to be a successful alteration from a commercial perspective. As we now know, the tiles started to be painted in blue from 1621; this single color became so popular that it developed into one of the distinctive features of Dutch tiles in many towns from 1625



Fig. 15. Tiles (1620–1640). Collection J. Holtkamp.

onward.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the Chinese Wanli pattern, which consists of an assortment of round, scalloped, and bracketed frames or a theatrical archway, is often used as a corner motif, as we can see in the example illustrated in Fig. 15.<sup>36</sup> The main motifs in the middle fields – ranging from biblical scenes to scenes of daily life such as human figures and animals – are typically derived from Dutch drawings and engravings.<sup>37</sup>

### Conclusion

As I have argued, the development of Delftware decorative styles and patterns is closely connected to the importation of Chinese porce-

<sup>35</sup> Fock C.W., *Het Nederlandse Interieur in Beeld 1600–1900* (Zwolle: 2001) 31. Also see Van Dam J.D. – Tichelaar P.J., *Dutch Tiles in the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia: 1984) 24.

<sup>36</sup> Van Dam J.D. – Tichelaar P.J., *Dutch Tiles in the Philadelphia Museum of Art* 174–175.

<sup>37</sup> Biesboer P., *Nederlandse Majolica, 1550–1650* (Amsterdam: 1997) 107.

lain, and deeply influenced by the market demand in the Netherlands and in Europe. Dutch potters evidently sensed the market's changing tastes and hence altered the style of Delftware from simple imitation of Chinese motifs to the active invention of *Chinoiserie* by imbricating Western and Oriental patterns, eventually developing a unique style of their own. Old patterns continued to be used alongside new developments, resulting in numerous permutations and combinations during the overlapping periods. The decorative Delftware offered a generally acceptable and distinctive artistic style, becoming famous throughout Europe. It created its own extensive market, and was exported in large quantities to foreign countries, particular in northern Europe including England, Germany, and France, which in turn influenced the faience industries in those countries.

From the beginning of the eighteenth century, the taste for blue-and-white porcelain started to decline and Europeans started to appreciate the colorfully decorated porcelain more, especially the Japanese 'Imari ware'. The decoration of these wares was also closely imitated and copied by Chinese potters, and such Chinese porcelain was also exported to Europe. Again, the Dutch potters responded to this competition by imitating the style and decoration of these wares to produce their own products. Chinese blue-and-white porcelain and its later developments formed a continual source of inspiration for Delft potteries and is an integral part of the history of Delftware, which also became a part of the Dutch national heritage.

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